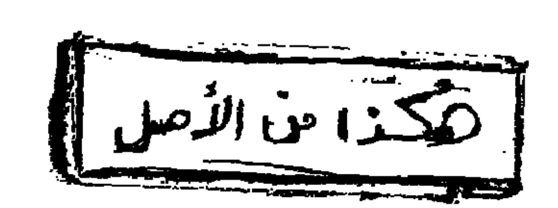


Al-Ahram Weekly

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Liberation anniversary

AS PART of national celebrations marking the 15th anniversary of the liberation of the Sinai peninsula from Israeli occupation, President Hosni Mubarak placed wreaths of flowers yesterday at the monument of the Unknown Soldier and the tomb of late President Anwar El-Sadat in suburban Nasr City. Mubarak was accompanied by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Parliament Speaker Fathi Sorour and Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi.

Mubarak also conferred with El-Ganzouri who submitted to him a report on the results of his Far Eastern tour that included Malaysia, Singapore and China.

The president then met with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa to review the situation in the stalled Middle East peace process. Asked whether "specific steps" were in the making to revive the process, Moussa responded: "Unfortunately, there are no steps on the horizon at the present time."

Train stop

MOHAMED Dawoud El-Ghamrawi, state minister for Military Cooperation, says the train of normalising Egyptian-Israeli relations will never reach the station of joint cooperation between the military industries of the two countries. In an exclusive interview with **Galal Nassar**, El-Ghamrawi also said that the government's sprint for privatising the public sector will not affect military production factories which, being a bulwark of national security, must remain under state control.

In the wide-ranging interview, El-Ghamrawi spoke about Egyptian-American military cooperation, including the ambitious, but controversial, scheme for the assembly of the ultra-modern M1-A1 tank in Egypt, and the contribution of the military industry to the Toshki desert-cultivation project in the south of the Western Desert.

(for full text of interview, see p.3)

UN session

THE UN General Assembly is scheduled to hold an emergency session today to debate Israel's plan to build a Jewish settlement in disputed East Jerusalem. Over 90 UN member states supported a request by Arab countries for such a session, AFP reported.

The session will be held under the General Assembly's 1950 "Uniting for Peace" formula. The formula calls for the General Assembly to act to maintain world peace in cases where action by the Security Council proves ineffective.

The emergency session is expected to last for two days and end up in a resolution calling for a freeze on settlement activities in Jerusalem.

In a related development, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan met yesterday in the Red Sea port of Aqaba to discuss ways to get the stalled peace talks back on track. Before leaving for Aqaba, Arafat received a telephone call from US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Palestinian officials said the conversation focused on the peace process.



ODE TO JOY: The operetta *El-Leila El-Kebira*, originally a radio production, successfully transferred to the stage, performed by puppets, to become a sixties phenomenon beloved by generations of children. The score and libretto was perhaps the most successful product of the artistic collaboration between Salah Jahin and Sayed Mekkawi. Mekkawi died this week, on 21 April; Jahin 11 years earlier, on the same day. They leave behind them a work that is, in many ways, a distillation of the festive spirit, so much in evidence this April which combines the Muslim Eid, Coptic Easter and the shared celebration of Sham El-Nessim. (Mekkawi obituary, p.2; *El-Leila El-Kebira* recalled, p. 10)
photo: courtesy of Nagi Shaker

'A moral breakdown'

The Israeli attorney-general's decision not to indict Binyamin Netanyahu will bolster the position of his most extreme coalition partners, reports *Graham Usher* **from Jerusalem.** *Al-Ahram Weekly* **reviews Egyptian reactions**

The decision by Israel's attorney-general not to indict Israeli leader Binyamin Netanyahu on charges of fraud and breach of trust for his involvement in the Bar-On affair has, for now at least, laid to rest any prospect of the Likud-led government's imminent collapse. But the tremors caused by Israel's worst ever political scandal are likely to be felt for a while yet. For the Palestinians — and the battered Oslo process — the danger is that the eventual fall-out may be a strengthening of Netanyahu's present coalition rather than a weakening of it.

This appears to be the immediate outcome of the whole debacle. After the attorney-general's decision, Netanyahu appeared live on a nationwide TV broadcast. He admitted that "errors had been made" and promised to "act in a cooperative way with my partners in the coalition", opening decision-making to all cabinet members.

If Netanyahu is true to his word, it is the bleakest of scenarios for the peace process. The Palestinians have always charged that Netanyahu interprets Oslo according to the dictates of his coalition rather than to the terms of the agreements. Any move to further empower his rightist coalition partners is thus likely to make Israel even more rejectionist towards Palestinians' national aspirations. It is a post-Bar-On denouement Netanyahu appeared to anticipate in his TV broadcast.

"Our political rivals... cannot accept the fact that the people voted for us, and not for them," he said. "They cannot accept our vigorous objection to a Palestinian state. They refuse to be reconciled that we are guarding the Golan Heights. They will not succeed."

Following the attorney-general's announcement the Labour and Meretz opposition filed five petitions with Israel's High Court of Justice in an attempt to have the decision overturned. Claiming Netanyahu's coalition had lost the "ethical basis" to govern, the Labour Party also pledged a popular political campaign to bring the government down. But according to Israeli analysts, neither course of action is likely to succeed.

Polls conducted after the attorney-general's verdict showed a solid 58 per cent of Israelis behind Netanyahu's decision not to resign or call new elections over the affair. If the Labour opposition is to remove Netanyahu, it will need to prise away elements of the coalition. Prior to the attorney-general's decision there were signs this could happen but not, it appears, any longer.

Two coalition parties — the Russian immigrant Israel B'Aliyah and the centrist Third Way (which together have three ministers and 11 Knesset members) — had strongly implied that they would not be able to stay in the government if criminal charges against Netanyahu were filed. Once it became clear this was not likely to happen Israel B'Aliyah leader, Nathan Sharansky, declared that his party would stay in the coalition. So did Third Way, and for similar reasons. "There was a moral breakdown which casts doubt on Netanyahu's ability to be head of the government," admitted Third Way chairman Yehuda Harel. "Nonetheless, we must not forget we have a clear interest in keeping the Jordan Valley and the Golan Heights". Harel is a leader of the Golan's 13,000 Jewish settlers.

Netanyahu's main headache is how to assuage the anger of the Sephardi orthodox party, Shas, and especially its leader, Aryeh Deri. Of the four government officials slated for criminal charges — Netanyahu, Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi, Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office Avigdor Lieberman and Deri — only one, Deri, was recommended for indictment by the attorney-general.

For Shas and its followers, it was further proof of the Ashkenazi bias of Israel's political and legal establishments. "Four people were recommended for indictment and the three Ashkenazis came away clean, and only Deri, the Sephardic, was accused. This is ethnic persecution," said Shas's Deputy Religious Affairs Minister Aryeh Gamliel.

Deri is threatening to fight the indictment while Shas's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadis Yusuf, has warned that his followers might have to reconsider their relation to "the rule of law". But it is unlikely that Shas will bolt the coalition. Rather, Deri's sights seemed trained on the opposition, and particularly the secularist Meretz bloc, whom he and other Shas activists see as instigating an Ashkenazi "plot" to oust him from political life. "The notepad is open and the hand is taking notes," warned Deri after the attorney-general's decision.

In statements made to *Al-Ahram Weekly* yesterday, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri insisted that the decision not to indict Binyamin Netanyahu was a "completely internal affair", expressing the hope that once the affair ends the Israeli government will re-focus its attentions on furthering the peace process.

The fraud and breach of trust scandal, though, has left Netanyahu little choice but to seek support from the far right, according to political analysts. And making concessions to the extreme right, experts argue, can only complicate the already stalled peace process.

"If this is the price for staying in power Netanyahu will not hesitate to pay it," said political science professor Hassan Nafaa, "and this spells disaster for the peace process."

Most commentators agreed that the scandal had further reduced the possibility of a Likud-Labour alliance and the emergence of a national unity government, which might have helped move the peace process forward.

Events surrounding the "Bibigate" scandal have exposed "Netanyahu as someone who makes many mistakes on both the domestic and foreign levels," claimed Abdel-Moneim Said, head of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. Netanyahu, like Manachem Begin, is an ideological politician, said Said, the difference being that "Begin surrounded himself with professionals who understood the wheeling and dealing of internal politics".

"Our concern is that Mr Netanyahu will, in an attempt to repair the damage this case has brought, continue and even increase, settlement activity and persist in the non-implementation of the [peace] agreements," said Saeb Erekat, chief Palestinian negotiator. And true enough, on Monday Netanyahu reaffirmed his intransigent stand: "There won't be a change in my policy, and the Palestinian demand that we stop the construction [of settlements] will simply delay any possibility of any resolution of the crisis," he said.

Teaming up with tigers

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri is back in Cairo following an Asian tour in which he sought to forge economic partnerships with three Asian tigers. Shaden Shehab reviews the achievements

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri returned to Cairo on Tuesday after a 10-day tour of the Far East, during which he signed agreements for launching three mega-projects, including a harbour for container vessels east of Port Said and a free trade zone north of the Gulf of Suez. Ganzouri said the "fruitful" tour, which included Malaysia, Singapore and China, was designed to lure additional investments from the three Asian tigers.

Before flying back to Cairo Ganzouri told reporters in China that, since the beginning of 1996, 53 laws had been passed "to protect investments and remove obstacles in the way of investors". The objective of the legislation, he said, was to increase production and iron out any anomalies.

The major achievement of the tour, the first by an Egyptian prime minister in the region in 33 years, was the signing of three memoranda of understanding, covering the three mega-projects, with the countries Ganzouri visited.

The first project, which will be carried out in cooperation with Malaysia, involves establishing an agricultural-industrial complex at Oweinat, in the south of the Western Desert, where an area of 50,000 feddans will be cultivated with cotton.

The Singaporean project involves building a harbour for cargo containers east of the Suez Canal, near Port Said at the Canal's northern end. In the third mega-project, China will provide assistance in developing a free trade zone overlooking the Gulf of Suez.

Moreover, Ganzouri said, several agreements, covering 13 investment projects, were signed with the three countries. "These projects, once implemented, will open up new horizons for foreign investments and will encourage other nations in the region, such as Japan and Thailand, to provide [additional] investments," he said.

Egypt, Ganzouri boasted, possesses the appropriate infrastructure and is using a "new language" in dealing with businessmen.

Ganzouri said the tour had been governed by a "specific logic, a mode of partnership between Egypt and those countries [seeking access] to markets in the Middle East and Africa. Egypt lies in the heart of this region, inhabited by 800 million people. If these countries export their products via Egypt, this will cut about 30 per cent off transport costs."

Ganzouri said the target of the tour "was not to obtain money but to achieve a partnership".

Three agreements were signed with Malaysia, covering investment guarantees, the avoidance of double taxation and air transport. Ganzouri and his Malaysian counterpart, Mahatir Mohamed, also signed two memoranda of understanding for the promotion of trade exchange and tourism cooperation.

Similar agreements for investment guarantees and the avoidance of double taxation were also signed with Singapore. Moreover, other cooperation agreements were signed for upgrading a military shipbuilding yard in Alexandria and establishing a palm-oil refinery and an advanced technological project in Sinai.

In Beijing, Ganzouri and Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng signed a memorandum of understanding for promoting trade between the two countries and boosting the volume of Egyptian exports to China to about $100 million by 1998. Another memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of electric power was also signed along with an agreement for rural development.

Egyptian and Chinese businessmen signed 12 business deals, covering the establishment of an automative spare parts factory, a cement factory in Sinai, the production of raw materials for pharmaceuticals and the transfer of genetic engineering technology — a first in Egypt — for the production of enzymes and hormones. Smaller projects include joint ventures in the production of butane gas and the manufacture of electric appliances.

Ganzouri was accompanied on the tour by the ministers of electricity, trade, industry, local administration and cabinet affairs, as well as a delegation of about 25 businessmen.

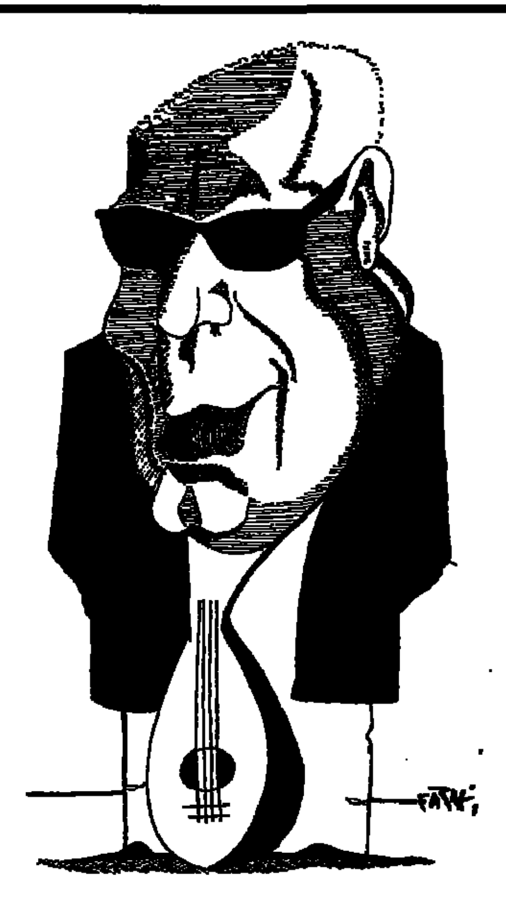
On the way back to Cairo, Ganzouri stopped over in Abu Dhabi for talks with Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan, ruler of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The talks, Ganzouri said, covered the participation of Arab investors in national development projects, including the ambitious scheme to dig an irrigation canal to carry the Nile's waters to the arid Toshki region in the south of the Western Desert.

Egyptians have lived for many centuries on 5.5 per cent of the country's area, despite an ever-increasing population, and "now it is an urgent necessity to break loose from the Nile Valley," Ganzouri said. "This requires Arab and foreign investments."

INSIDE

Editor - in - Chief Dr. Taha Abdel - Alim

Chairman of the Board Ibrahim Nafie





FESTIVALS GALORE. Egyptians took to public parks, the Nile banks, sea shores and amusement parks as they celebrated the Muslim *Eid Al-Adha* feast last Thursday-through-Sunday (above left).

Muslims slaughtered sheep and distributed their meat to the poor on this occasion, which marks the readiness of the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son at God's behest. Hardly were the celebrations over, than the nation's Coptic Christians prepared to celebrate Easter on Sunday. Above right, a St. Catherine's Monastery icon depicting the Flight into Egypt.

Moreover, both Muslims and Christians will celebrate on Monday *Sham El-Nessim*, a spring festival that dates back to Pharaonic times. Egyptians spend the day outdoors, consuming large amounts of salted fish, lettuce and other green vegetables.

Obituary

Death of a great composer

Composer and singer Sayed Mekkawi, whose songs were popular with Egyptians from all walks of life and all age brackets, died on Monday at his Cairo home from complications caused by pneumonia. He was 70.

Mekkawi achieved great popularity in Egypt and the Arab world for writing music that was part and parcel of the great Arab heritage. Throughout his life, he remained undaunted by modern innovations and the attempts of rivals to produce a blend of Arab and Western music.

Mekkawi was born in the El-Nasriya quarter in Cairo, near Sayeda Zeinab. According to his mother, he was a sensitive and affectionate young boy, extremely attached to his family. When his father died, Mekkawi cried for days. Later, legend has it, the pain eased, but the tears kept flowing. Doctors were powerless either to diagnose his condition or to stop the tears, and one day, he could no longer see. This affliction, however, did not prevent him from learning the Qur'an and becoming an Azharite *fiqi*, a Muslim scholar.

Mekkawi's greatest pleasure as a child was to ride his bicycle. His neighbours, knowing his handicap, always looked out for him and with their help he managed to stay clear of danger. His mother dreamt of giving him one of her eyes but Mekkawi always refused to let her, as he later refused the operation which a Russian eye surgeon offered to perform on him in the hope that he might regain his sight. "I am used to blindness," Mekkawi told him. "It does not hurt anymore, but I would hate to hope and then be disappointed." He remained blind and was never seen in public without his trademark dark glasses.

It is said that once, while he was rehearsing with Umm Kalthoum for the song *Ya Missaharni* ("I Cannot Sleep because of You"), which introduced him for the first time to the theatre, he arrived half an hour late. Umm Kalthoum, who was very punctual, reprimanded him sternly. "I am sorry," he said, "but I was driving and I had to stop at all the traffic lights." Umm Kalthoum liked the joke and forgave him.

Having been trained in the art of Qur'an reciting, Mekkawi's voice could soar, gruff but powerful, to thrill his listeners. He sang at numerous concerts, accompanying himself on the *oud*, the lute, though this is not what brought him fame, or confirmed his status as one of the most gifted and popular composers of Arab music.

What did bring him fame, however, was the unforgettable character of *El-Missaharati*, the man who announces the pre-dawn meal during the month of Ramadan, that he and Fuad Haddad created in 1951. A popular figure during the holy month, the *missaharati* was given new life by Haddad's words and Mekkawi's music. Composed to the beat of the traditional *tabla*, it stirrs up feelings of patriotism, nationalism and pride in Arab and Muslim culture. The *missaharati* represented an entire generation, expressing its pains, frustrations and dreams. When *El-Missaharati* was aired for the first time on the radio, it instantly became a symbol of national aspirations. Forty years later, it continues to help the faithful keep vigil, exhorting Muslims to awake for their pre-dawn meal.

Mekkawi's love for his country permeated all his music, says Farag El-Ansari, an expert in folkloric music at the Music Institute and member of the Art Committee at the Higher Council for Culture, who considers Mekkawi one of the Arab world's most important *sha'bi* (popular) composers. Mekkawi addressed all the important economic, social, intellectual and political issues directly concerning the less privileged classes. Critical of any national shortcoming, he was prompt to deride bureaucracy in his song *El-Istemara Rakba El-Humara* ("The Questionnaire on a Donkey"), but *Sanuhareb* ("We Shall Fight"), which came out in 1956, and *El-Ard Bitetkalem Arabi* ("The Earth Speaks Arabic"), composed after 1973, were also true expressions of his pride in his country.

More than anything, however, Mekkawi will be remembered for his contribution to Egyptian folkloric music and especially the operetta *El-Leila El-Kebira* ("The Big Night"), for which he wrote the music to the words of poet Salah Jahin. First conceived as a work for the radio, describing the last and most important night of the *moulid*, a saint's festival, it was later adapted for the puppet theatre and aired on television, becoming an instant and lasting success with children and grown-ups alike.

By a strange coincidence, Mekkawi died on the 11th anniversary of Jahin's death. Of Jahin, he used to say, "We get along like *assal* with *tehina*." (Mollasses and sesame paste always go together).

His works include 100 musical compositions for religious songs; 30 compositions celebrating the Prophet's birthday or *Moulid El-Nabi*; *El-Missaharati*; *Ya Messaharni* for Umm Kalthoum; the operetta *El-Leila El-Kebira*; music for several TV series and music for the songs of almost all popular singers, except Abdel-Halim Hafez. He also acted in one film directed by Ali Badrakhan, *El-Arous El-Saghira* ("The Little Bride"), and composed the music to Harun El-Rashid, a TV series with Mahmoud El-Saadani and Salah Jahin. Among his most popular songs are *Nashid El-Muqawma El-Sha'biya* ("The Popular Resistance Anthem"), *Gana El-Fagr* (Dawn Is upon Us"), and *Ummal Hafr El-Qanal* ("The Workers who Dug the Canal").

Last month, Mekkawi travelled to Lebanon to sing in a concert, but had to be admitted to hospital with severe pneumonia. He was flown back to Egypt to continue his treatment and returned home a week ago, but his condition deteriorated suddenly.

He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Fayza Hassan

CORRECTION

In an interview published by *Al-Ahram Weekly* last week with First Foreign Under-secretary Adel El-Safti, it was mistakenly reported that a tour he recently made in Asia included South Korea. A spokeswoman for El-Safti said this was incorrect. In fact, El-Safti is planning to visit South Korea in the near future, she said.

Opposition want normalisation downscaled

Opposition parties, reacting to Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, are urging the government to curtail the scope of its relations with Israel, reports **Dina Ezzat**

Leaders of opposition parties are meeting today at the offices of the Wafd Party to forge a united position against Israel's decision to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem. A communiqué will be issued condemning Israel's "intransigence" and urging the government to slow down, if not put on hold altogether, the process of normalising bilateral relations.

The communiqué will be signed by representatives of the Wafd, Liberal, Labour, Nasserist and Tagammu parties as well as the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and the Communists.

"Jerusalem is the focus of this meeting," said Yassin Serageddin, the Wafd's spokesman. "The opposition forces in Egypt cannot accept what is happening in Jerusalem. Israel cannot have its way and go unopposed."

Ibrahim Shukri, leader of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, added that "what is happening in Jerusalem is a direct insult to the holy sites of both Muslims and Christians."

The meeting's organisers hope the government will respond to their call for curtailing the scope of Egyptian-Israeli relations. According to the leaders of the Liberal and Tagammu parties, respectively Mustafa Kamel Murad and Khaled Mohieddin, the government should act in accordance with the will of the people, who are angered by Israel's infringement of the rights of the Palestinians.

"I am quite hopeful here," said Hamed Mahmoud, chief of the political bureau of the Nasserist party. "Usually there is a gap between the positions of the government and the opposition, but not on this one."

According to Maamoun El-Hodeibi, the Brotherhood's spokesman, the opposition forces will specify in their communiqué the measures they expect the government to take.

These are likely to include a call for reducing the size of the Egyptian diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv, discouraging independent businessmen from doing business with Israel and putting on ice the ongoing cooperation between the Egyptian and Israeli ministries of agriculture.

"We cannot act as if nothing were happening there [in Jerusalem]," Mahmoud said.

Mohieddin argued that Egypt should not exonerate itself from honouring a recommendation passed recently by the Arab League for freezing relations with Israel on the grounds that the two countries are bound by a peace treaty.

"I think our communiqué can be used by the government to justify the actions it should take in accordance with the will of the people," said Serageddin.

However, the opposition forces will have to iron out some differences before the text of the communiqué is finalised. "Obviously the views held by the leftist political parties on some matters are at variance with the positions taken by the Wafd or even the Islamists," Mahmoud said.

While the leftists prefer to refer to Israel as the "Zionist entity," thus withholding recognition of it as a state, the Wafd has no qualms about calling a spade a spade, Mahmoud explained.

There are also substantive disagreements about the nature of the recommendations that should be passed by the meeting. While the Wafd and the Liberals are in favour of a "fairly unprovocative" set of demands, the leftists and Islamists insist on an "uncompromising line." The consensus is that all participants will have to make compromises before the communiqué is finalised.

The opposition forces had invited to the meeting representatives of the ruling National Democratic Party but were turned down.

Minya violence

THE MINYA province in southern Egypt was the scene of violence on Tuesday when suspected Islamist militants killed two Christians, one of them a policeman, and shot dead a second policeman in an exchange of fire with security forces.

According to an Interior Ministry statement, residents of the town of Samallout in Minya province found the body of Istafanous Zaki, a 55-year-old Christian farmer, lying in his field late on Monday.

When security forces moved to the area to hunt down the killers, they came under heavy fire that killed a policeman and wounded two officers and five policemen.

In a second statement, the Interior Ministry said security forces came upon the body of Hilmi Wadie, another Christian who works as a policeman, as they combed nearby plantations in search for the "terrorists."

Security sources blamed the killings on the anti-government Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya.

Assiut ambush

TWO police officers were killed and four policemen wounded in an ambush, presumably by militants from Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, around midnight last Friday in the southern governorate of Assiut. The police force was driving to a village near Dairout to arrest an escaped criminal when it came under a hail of automatic rifle fire from nearby plantations.

Captains Abdallah Hamdan and Ayman Zaki were killed instantly and four policemen were wounded. Five others, who were uninjured, exchanged fire with the ambushers but they managed to escape. A preliminary investigation placed the number of the assailants at three. Several suspects were arrested.

Ex-minister dies

AHMED Salama, a former state minister for parliamentary affairs, died on Sunday in a car accident along the Alexandria-Cairo highway. He was 69.

Salama was driving back to Cairo, after a holiday in Alexandria, when his front tyre burst, causing the car to overturn. He was killed instantly and his wife and the couple's housemaid were injured.

Salama rose through the ranks of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) to become the party's assistant secretary-general and legal adviser. He was named minister of local government in 1986 and a year later was appointed minister of state for parliamentary affairs. He left the cabinet in a 1993 reshuffle.

Salama taught law at Ain Shams University and authored several books on the Egyptian legal system.

Businesswoman on trial

BUSINESSWOMAN Mona El-Shafei and four officials of the Nasr Import and Export Company went on trial on Monday before the Supreme State Security Court on charges of committing financial irregularities involving the illegal appropriation of millions of pounds.

The four officials were accused of providing El-Shafei with credit facilities amounting to LE47 million from the Nasr company's funds without adequate collateral. The money was illegally appropriated by El-Shafei, who owns and runs the Egypt Far East Company.

Hearings were postponed until 17 May.

Egypt to vice-chair rights committee

The election of Egypt as vice-chair of a UN Human Rights Committee has encouraged local activists to demand a better observance of human rights standards. **Dina Ezzat** reports

Human rights organisations and activists were taken by surprise last week by the news that Egypt had been elected as vice-chair of the United Nations Committee for Human Rights (UNCHR). They argued that Egypt still has a long way to go to realise what they described as an "acceptable" standard of observance of human rights.

According to the rules of the UNCHR, which is currently chaired by the Czech Republic, Egypt will occupy the vice-chair's seat for 12 months.

Ambassador Na'ila Gabr, director of the human rights department at the foreign ministry, said the choice was primarily related to Egypt's leading role in the activities of the committee.

The UN committee, she said, focuses on all human rights issues, encompassing environmental, developmental and political rights.

"It should be stated here that Egypt has a very good set of legislative measures that endorse the exercise of human rights," Gabr said. "Egypt also takes serious measures to guarantee the application of this legislation, as well as investigating alleged violations of human rights."

The UNCHR has 53 members who are elected every three years in a way that provides a fair representation of all the world's geographical and political blocs. The nomination and election to the posts of the chair and vice-chair follow the same rules of rotation.

Egypt has been a member of the committee since 1995, representing the North African region. Now, as vice-chair, it represents the whole of Africa.

"Nobody can deny the role played by Egypt in coordination with all the UN human rights bodies to defend the rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories and its long-term stance opposing apartheid in South Africa," Gabr said. She added that Egypt, despite some "limited" reservations, was a signatory of a large number of human rights-related agreements and conventions.

For their part, human rights activists argued that Egypt's defence of the rights of the Palestinians in occupied territories does not justify what they describe as "gross and systematic violations of human rights" directed against Egyptians inside Egypt.

"Egypt's human rights record is still considered to be a bad one," said Nigad El-Bora'i, director of the Group for the Development of Democracy. He added that the resort to violence by law enforcement agents, particularly in dealing with members of militant Islamist groups, continues to be widely reported.

And, according to Bahieddin Hassan, director of the Cairo Centre for Human Rights Studies, "the fact that the emergency law has been enforced for 16 years non-stop, and was recently prolonged for the coming three years, torpedoes any claim about Egypt's observance of human rights."

Moreover, Hassan found that the "many restrictions imposed on the functioning of the non-governmental organisations in Egypt" go "by definition against the concepts of encouraging the required observance of human rights."

Gabr responded that Egypt "is not the only country in the world that resorts to emergency laws." She said: "The application of the emergency law, as made very clear by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, is restricted to very limited purposes. It is used only in cases of terrorism and some of the big drug smuggling cases."

Curtain falls on downtown theatre

A government-run theatre was forced to shut down after its original owners won a court order. **Hanan Sabra** reviews the controversy

The Ministry of Culture had no choice but to shut down the Mohamed Farid theatre in downtown Cairo after the original owners of the building emerged victorious from a protracted legal battle, winning a court order that restored their property. The curtain came down abruptly at the end of March on "*Massa El-Kheir, Ya Misr*," (Good evening, Egypt), a political satire, starring Mohamed Mounir and Sawsan Badr. After a six-week hiatus, the play began performing again, as of 17 April, at the Nile-side Fatma Rushdi theatre near the University bridge in Manial.

The Ministry of Culture, hoping to purchase the building back, has opened negotiations with the owners. In the meantime, and in compliance with the court order, the owners were allowed to retake possession of the theatre last Monday. According to Sami Khashaba, head of the Culture Ministry's Drama House, the ministry has offered the owners LE7,000 per square metre for the property. "We hope that a settlement would be reached, under which the building would be sold back to the ministry's Drama House," he said.

Informed sources said that a private sector producer has also contacted the owners, offering a handsome amount of money if they agreed to rent the theatre to him.

"The play was terminated, without advance notice to the performers," Mounir said. He added that the shutdown cost him and his colleagues financial losses, for which they have not been compensated by the ministry. And yet, Mounir is starring again in the re-performance.

According to William Ebeid, the theatre's financial and administrative manager, the legal battle began nearly 20 years ago when the building's owners filed a lawsuit demanding the restoration of their property. The building originally was owned by a Belgian company that was nationalised in the 1960s. When the nationalisation was lifted in 1975, this company sold the building to the heirs of Mosaad Fayez, but the Ministry of Culture remained in possession. As a result, the buyers initiated the legal action, winning the first round in the late 1980s.

The Ministry of Culture did not give up. Sayed Radi, head of Drama House at the time, managed to obtain a decree from then Prime Minister Atef Sidki that the building should remain in the ministry's possession as a "public utility." The owners contested this decree before a civil court and won. The Drama House filed a counter-lawsuit with an administrative court that supported the Prime Minister's decree. Since the decisions of the civil and administrative courts were diametrically opposed, the matter had to be referred to the Supreme Constitutional Court that eventually ruled in the owners' favour.

Essam El-Sayed, the theatre's manager, said Drama House filed a last-minute appeal but it was thrown out on 6 April. The equipment of the theatre was removed to a neighbouring theatre, called Misr, which was shut down three years ago because it is on the verge of collapse, Ebeid said.

Salah El-Kashef, head of the theatre's legal department, said that although the owners have retaken possession of the building, they are not allowed by law to alter the nature of the activity taking place there. "The theatre has to remain a theatre," he said. "The owners realised that they are not professional enough to run a theatre and this is why they opened negotiations with the Ministry of Culture in order to reach a settlement," El-Kashef said.

هكذا من الأصل

Repelling an 'enemy' offensive

***In a tactical exercise, a mechanised infantry division* launched a counter-offensive to repel advancing 'enemy' forces in the Western Desert. Galal Nassar was there**

Assisted by warplanes and helicopters, the army's 9th mechanised infantry division staged a tactical exercise in the Western Desert, featuring a counter-attack to repel an advancing 'enemy' force that had managed to infiltrate front-line defences. The exercise, which was observed by Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, took place between 4-23 April in a area south of the highway connecting Giza with a string of oases in the Western Desert.

American-made F-16 jet-fighters and French gazelle helicopters flew reconnaissance missions to pinpoint the positions of the advancing 'enemy' force. Heavy guns then went into action, firing a *shell every five seconds to blast 'enemy' positions. The jet-fighters* and helicopters later returned to attack the same positions with air-to-ground missiles.

This was followed by a ground counter-offensive, staged by M-60 tanks, armoured vehicles firing TOW anti-tank missiles, M-113 *armoured personnel carriers and self-propelled artillery. The tank* commanders were ordered to fire their cannons from mobile, as opposed to stationary, positions.

The 'enemy' had to throw its warplanes in the fray, but they were quickly engaged and 'destroyed' by air defence forces.

The exercise was part of celebrations marking the 15th anniversary of the liberation of the Sinai desert from Israeli occupation.

"On this occasion, we affirm to all that hard training and combat readiness is our principal task," Tantawi said afterwards. "We do not know the meaning of military relaxation because its consequences are dire."





photos: Tony Fares

Arms for peacetime

Operating in a fiercely competitive world market and under the constraints of big power monopoly of advanced military technology, the Egyptian military industry is nevertheless confident of its ability to fulfil its fundamental strategic task — to provide for the needs of the armed forces and guarantee the country's national security, the state *minister for military production* tells Galal Nassar



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Egyptian military thinking has for decades recognised that a solid armaments industry is a vital condition for guaranteeing its military independence. But efforts to establish such an industry, which began in the late '50s and early '60s, have had to contend with tremendous obstacles. The fledgling industry, which included forays in the production of ground-to-ground missiles, called El-Zafer and El-Qaher, was strongly opposed by the Western states, which imposed on Egypt a technological blockade.

However, the situation changed following the 1973 October War which opened the door for negotiations that culminated in the conclusion of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Since then, the Egyptian military industry has taken great strides, including the production of 120mm, 122mm and 130mm artillery pieces, anti-aircraft guns and missiles, armoured vehicles, helicopters, anti-armour missiles and mines.

In addition to overhauling and renovating antiquated Soviet tanks, such as the T-54, T-55 and T-63 tanks, Egypt, with American assistance, began assembling the ultra-modern M1-A1 tank, although the scheme came under fire from US congressmen. The national military factories are also engaged in producing durable goods for consumers, which are available on the market at competitive prices.

In the following interview with Mohamed Dawoud El-Ghamrawi, the minister of state for *military production, Al-Ahram Weekly* sought to explore the future of Egypt's military industry under conditions of peace on the one hand and economic liberalisation and privatisation on the other.

El-Ghamrawi, who has occupied his current post since 14 October 1993, obtained a bachelor's degree in engineering from Cairo University in 1961 and graduated, the following year, from the military academy. He later travelled to the Soviet Union where he obtained a diploma in engineering in 1965, another diploma from Cairo's Nasser Military Academy in 1978, and a doctorate in engineering from France in 1983. He served with the armed forces in various formations and positions *until he rose to become chief of the* armament authority of the armed forces and to head their research department.

Where does the Egyptian military industry stand in relation to the growth of the arms industries of some countries of the region and the world?

Egyptian weapons, *within the framework of* international competition, have a good reputation. Suffice it to say that we export pistols and rifles to the United States, *which testifies to the good quality of* the national product. As you know, the arms industry is continuously developing. As a result, we have made available the financial allocations necessary for research, training new cadres and renovating equipment. Thus, we have been able to maintain our presence on the world market, despite the heavy competition.

Before discussing our military production abilities, however, we should review the situation in the *world arms market. Although the military industry* is subject to strict political considerations, it is no different from any civil industry, which is subject to the law of supply and demand. Since the end of the 1950s and until the '80s, the world arms trade flourished greatly because of the increasing number of states which gained independence, the mushrooming regional and international conflicts, the escalating role of the armed forces in suppressing liberation movements, the attempt of some Third World countries to impose their political hegemony outside their borders, the ever-increasing financial revenue of the petroleum-exporting states and the rapid technological advances that quickly turn modern equipment into obsolete scrap. Another auxiliary factor behind this boom were the credit facilities provided by the producers to the buyers.

The annual growth rate of the world military industry averaged 8 per cent during that period, with sales soaring as high as $78.6 billion in 1987. But following the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, recession hit the arms trade, which plummeted to $30 billion last year.

As a result, several giant manufacturers, such as British Aerospace, whose annual sales amount to $15 billion, turned to the production of civil aircraft, including participation in the production of the European Airbus plane. Others were forced to merge, such as the French Aerospatiale and the German Dasa, and yet others, such as the Dutch Fokker, faced the danger of collapse.

What is new in our military production is that we have obtained a licence for the manufacture of the 120mm barrel of the M1-A1 tank and it is being turned out now by our factories. Moreover, we are producing the 23mm Sinai automatic anti-aircraft system. Other weapons and ammunition we produce are being upgraded.

Did the peace treaty with Israel have an impact on our military production? And is the national military industry capable of meeting the requirements of the armed forces?

All countries of the world, although most of them are peace-oriented, maintain powerful armed forces and continuously develop and upgrade them. For, if *the achievement of peace is difficult, preserving* peace is even more difficult. Keeping up the peace momentum is not possible unless a deterrent force is available and capable of confronting any battle that may be imposed on it. Since this force has to be *armed with the latest technological* advances, we should not isolate ourselves from what is happening around us in the world, the inventions and the advances.

The national military industry is primarily responsible *for meeting the requirements of the* armed forces, which include weapons, equipment and ammunition, and keeping abreast with the latest technological advances. The progress of the military industry has positive reflections on civil industries.

I affirm anew that Egypt's peace-oriented policy does not negate the need for a military force capable of preserving this peace and protecting national security. Military production is the in*strument of meeting the requirements of the* armed forces, whether in wartime or peacetime, within the limits of the available resources. Egypt's commitment to its security does not run counter to its commitments under the international treaties it has signed.

The renowned political analyst, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal disclosed in an interview with an Arab newspaper, that Israel had offered to act as a subcontractor, re-exporting some of our products to the United States, in return for awarding Egypt a share of an American arms deal with Israel, worth $4 billion. Is this true? And is cooperation between the Egyptian and Israeli military industries possible?

First: we have not received such an offer from the Israeli government and I have never heard anything about this subject. Second: we have no joint ventures with Israel, whether under study or construction. Third: the train of normalisation will never reach the point of [joint] military production. This is our policy and it is clear-cut.



The Egyptian military industry has been associated for many years with the Eastern bloc. Was the national military industry affected by the collapse of this bloc or are we busy maintaining and renovating our Eastern-made weapons and equipment?

Cooperation with the Eastern bloc, at the inception of the military industry, is undeniable, but it took place a long time ago. Now all the assembly lines have been replaced by alternatives manufactured in other states, whether Western or South-East Asian states. These lines are working efficiently and we have encountered no production problems.

As to the Eastern-made equipment in our arsenal, *the armed forces are capable of maintaining and* renovating this equipment and putting it in a position of continuous readiness. We continue to have relations with the Eastern states and have no objection to increasing cooperation with them, as long as this cooperation is in the interest of the two sides.

What are the most prominent countries which contribute to arming and upgrading the armed forces and will their cooperation help Egypt manufacture warplanes, missiles and advanced technological equipment? And how useful is the offset system, which serves as the basis of Egypt's dealings with some countries?

There is no doubt that the national military industry has *benefited from the good political relations that* bind Egypt to the world's advanced and developing countries. The most prominent of these countries is the United States, which is making a great contribution to the manufacture of tanks, radars and am*munition.* We are also studying a number of joint cooperation programmes with a number of friendly countries.

As to the offset system, it is one form of commodity exchange which is now widespread between companies and states. For example, we manufacture some components for the weapons which some foreign, particularly French, companies will be supplying to us. We also make 122-mm guns which are mounted on an armoured vehicle that is manufactured by an American company for the Egyptian armed forces. The offset system is also useful in the transfer of technology to our factories and workers.

The military factory 200, which assembles the M1-A1 tank, has repeatedly come under fire from US congressmen on the grounds that the production cost is exorbitant. They demanded that the factory be converted to the production of civil machinery. What is the future of this project?

There is an ambiguity here, which I should clear away. This factory is equipped for the production of tanks but it also has the infrastructure for producing heavy machinery. The agreement concluded with the American side covers the production of a specific number of M1-A1 tanks within a specific period of time, but it also covers the possibility of producing other equipment, in case this is needed and serves the interests of the two sides. Studies are under way at present covering [the options of] the continued production of tanks, the production of tracked armoured vehicles and using the factory's surplus capability for the production of heavy machinery.

What can be said is that exhaustive studies are being carried out, in cooperation with the American side, on how to make use of the great capabilities of this factory, once the tank-production programme is completed. We, for our part, are considering the possibility of manufacturing parts for giant power stations, heavy vehicles for civil and military use, earth-moving machinery, tractors and trailers.

The proof that this project has been successful is that the Egyptian product is of the same quality as the American product. The performance of the Egyptian-assembly tank was rated at 98 per cent, *which made the US Defence Department issue it a* certificate of merit, after it was subjected to numerous tests in the United States.

It is not true that the production cost in Egypt is higher than that in the United States. In calculating the cost, the Americans only took into account the 550 tanks which the assembly lines will turn out for the Egyptian armed forces. But this is unreasonable because the life expectancy of the factory's machinery ranges between 15 and 20 years. The difference between us and the American side centres on this point. We believe that this factory made it possible for us to absorb advanced technology, which was not previously available, and provided a large number of workers with advanced training. Our calculations show that the production cost in Egypt is lower and yet the product has the same quality [as its American counterpart].

How would you characterise the American military assistance to Egypt? Does the United States seek to ensure Israel's superiority by refusing to provide Egypt with some modern technologies? Did this have an impact on the national military industry?

It is true that the United States is more generous with Israel, whether in terms of technology transfer or the volume of aid. And yet, our relations with the United States are good and profound, and have resulted in giant production projects, such as the tank factory and the manufacture of two-dimensional radars and heavy equipment — all requiring the transfer of advanced technology. And yet, we are looking forward to greater technological cooperation with the United States, not for achieving a balance with Israel, [but for redressing the imbalance] up to a reasonable point.

'The train of normalisation will never reach the point of [joint] military production. This is our policy and it is clear-cut'

As for our own capabilities, we should not forget that we have scientists, who are at the highest level in all branches of science and technology, whether inside or outside Egypt. They contribute to upgrading our capabilities as well as the abilities of the cadres working in our military factories. Suffice it to say that we have a plan for renovating all [military] factories and we have held [training] courses for 5,000 persons, including 400 engineers, annually. The number of those accepted in the military training centres has risen from 900 to 2,000 persons annually.

Suffice it also to say that we are capable now of manufacturing an Egyptian tank because we have an advanced infrastructure for the military industry.

Egypt maintains strong relations with China, which is a military production giant. How do you view these relations which definitely include cooperation between the military industries of the two countries?

It is true that our relations with China are strong and that they include cooperation in military production. We have recently imported assembly lines from China and we also have joint programmes for the production of civil and military equipment, including cement factories and civil and military vehicles. China also provided assistance in upgrading thousands of workshops.

I am planning to pay an official visit to Beijing in the near future for talks on the joint cooperation programme. The talks will focus on producing and upgrading artillery pieces and ammunition.

In a statement to the National Security Committee of the People's Assembly last January, you stated that the five big powers are putting pressure on smaller countries with the aim of exercising control on the production of all types of weapons, even conventional weapons. Has Egypt been exposed to such pressures and, if yes, can we still be competitive on the world arms market?

It is well-known that competition is fierce on the world market, particularly in peacetime. As part of this competition, the major powers may place obstacles in the way of the smaller countries, such as raising the prices of raw materials or clamping a ban on the export of some components. However, these obstacles can be surmounted by means of the good relations binding one state to another, and this is what Egypt is doing as a result of its balanced foreign policy.

Here, we should go back to the recession on the world market, which we mentioned before, and its impact on the Third World. In the 1970s, the major arms producers began granting production licenses to developing nations. As a result, the number of developing nations which manufacture weapons rose from 15 in the 1960s to 18 in the '70s and 28 in the '80s, accounting for 3.3 per cent of the world's total arms exports. These countries have been affected by the recession. We cannot deny that the Egyptian military industry was also affected because we are not isolated from the rest of the world. But the Egyptian industry is primarily directed at meeting the requirements of the armed forces. Even when we export weapons, this is done through the armed forces, and not through the world market.

Several public sector companies and factories are being turned over to private enterprise, as part of a government switch to privatisation. Will this affect our military factories?

The military production companies will not be privatised because they represent a principal and basic factor in preserving national security. It is important that they remain under state control in order to ensure that their objectives will be achieved. It should also be remembered that there is integration between the military production factories, and so some of them cannot be separated from the rest and given special treatment.

Despite an international trend for privatising military factories, like what is happening in France, the French government continues to exercise control over the major companies, such as Matra, Thomson-CSF and Dassault. The privatisation of Egyptian military factories is ruled out because they represent an important bulwark for our national security.

The Egyptian military factories have made significant contributions to numerous civil projects. Is this contribution likely to decline as a result of the government's privatisation policy?

As we said earlier, the demand on the world arms market usually plummets in peacetime. This has prompted the international companies to use part of their capabilities for civil production in order to shore up their finances. The Egyptian factories have been following this policy and using their surplus capabilities in peacetime for serving the state's development plans and making consumer goods available on the market at reasonable prices. This policy will continue.

The latest of these contributions is that we have obtained a LE30 million contract to provide the necessary dynamite for digging the Toshki Canal in the southern valley project. We are also determined to supply the basic equipment for this giant project, particularly the pumping station and irrigation equipment, whether as contractors or subcontractors for international companies. We have also signed contracts with the Ministry of Supply for manufacturing 2,000 vehicles, with the Ministry of Power for manufacturing up to 20 per cent of power stations, and with the Ministry of Housing for manufacturing 21 sanitary sewage stations.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Arabs under siege

A future more bleak than imagined awaits Arabs, writes **Eqbal Ahmad**, unless they are able to develop a strategy for solidarity and salvation

Three years ago, when critics of the Oslo Accords criticised its failure to address the fundamental questions of Palestinian survival and rights — i.e. Zionist colonisation of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli control of such natural resources as water and energy, and such rights as self-determination and the right of refugees to return — they were dismissed either as hard-line rejectionists or mere naysayers. "Cynics", screamed an editorial in the *New York Times*, who latch on to the formality of words and fail to see the historic shift of faith in the Middle East from conflict to peace.

Since I was among the alleged "cynics", I could not help feeling somewhat amused to read the *Times* editorial of Wednesday 9 April. "The Oslo agreements", opined the American newspaper of record, "give Israel legal authority to govern Jerusalem, and decide on its own the size of troop withdrawals in the West Bank." After cautioning "that authority need not always [sic] be flaunted" the *Times* goes on to say that "Prime Minister Netanyahu correctly notes that Israel has observed the legal requirements of the Oslo Accords. He has fulfilled Israel's commitment to pull back most of its troops from Hebron, release female Palestinian prisoners and set a further limited withdrawal from the rural areas of the West Bank." The *Times* draws a contrast, echoing verbatim all of Netanyahu's accusations: "Mr Arafat has not even bothered to fulfil many of his legal commitments under Oslo. He maintains an armed police force nearly double the size he agreed to. He has failed to complete the promised revision of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's charter to replace language calling for Israel's destruction. Most troubling, he has countenanced violent demonstrations, ordered his security forces to reduce cooperation with Israel and indulged leaders of Hamas and Islamic Holy War who urge suicide bombings."

I cite the *New York Times* only because, on the whole, the composition of its foreign affairs editorialists and columnists approximates the top echelons of Bill Clinton's national security administration. All of them — Defence Secretary Cohen, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, National Security advisor Sandy Berger, and Dennis Ross, the State Department's Middle East mediator — are Israel's dedicated partisans. Like all but two of the *Times* staff — columnist Abe Rosenthal and William Safire, who are die-hard, Arab-hating Likudists — they are uncomfortable with Binyamin Netanyahu's confrontational style and would encourage him the best they can to combine creating new facts with conciliatory gestures — "consult with the Palestinian leader, or even inform him in advance about Israeli decisions like the move to begin construction of the Har Homa housing project in East Jerusalem", as the *Times* editorial put it.

President Clinton's 7 April meeting with Netanyahu reflected this approach. Clinton urged conciliatory measures — construction of Arab housing in East Jerusalem, opening of an airport and seaport in Gaza, safe passage for Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank, and more permits for Palestinians to work in Israel. No objection was raised to the construction of new settlements in "Har Homa", though the President urged a cooling-off period. As for the Camp David-type talks which Netanyahu seeks for a final settlement, it was suggested that his posture would be more credible if he broadened his mandate by including Labour, specifically Shimon Peres, in his government. The media reported that Clinton avoided criticism of recent Israeli moves in the belief that Netanyahu will do better with "positive reinforcements." As one such "reinforcement", President Clinton promised the Israeli that the United States would lean on the Palestinian Authority to cooperate with Israel and restrain its radicals. As if to explain Clinton's complicity in Israel's violations of international laws and the UN Charter, the *New York Times* noted that "the Democratic Party, despite the fund-raising scandal, has a significant debt that conservative American Jews are relied upon to help retire."

On the day of the Clinton-Netanyahu meeting, two Zionist settlers, who are armed by Israel's government, killed a Palestinian in Hebron. In the protests, which followed, two more Arabs were killed and more than a hundred were wounded. Three days later, another news item underlined the shame that passes for the peace process in the Middle East. Israeli occupation authorities in the West Bank announced that, in a joint operation with the Palestinian police, they had uncovered an underground cell of Hamas. The capture of four Palestinians, suspects in the recent Tel Aviv bombing, was discussed by Yasser Arafat and Ami Ayalon, head of the Israeli secret service Shin Bet, which has been responsible for the torture and murder of thousands of Palestinians, Lebanese and, in yesteryears, Egyptians. The Israeli-Palestinian operation was coordinated, so the *New York Times* reported on 11 April, by the CIA, in order to "sidestep the breakdown of contacts between the Israelis and Palestinians." Binyamin Netanyahu welcomed Arafat's assistance, but emphasised that he expected more sustained collaboration on a "broader" basis.

I recall these recent happenings neither to inform nor to condemn, but to underline the realities of this 'peace process'. History shall not absolve our generation if we ignore its consequences, and posterity shall suffer if we fail to change its course. Official Israeli objectives in the Middle East are clear, as are the differences in the styles of Labour and Likud parties. Given the current configuration of power and political pressures, Washington's support for Israeli objectives is also a matter of minor fluctuations. What shape Israeli objectives and US proclivity to aid them will give to history and politics in the Middle East, however, remains a matter worthy of contemplation.

If the 'process' unfolds without significant intervention from the Arab side, its outcome is predictable. Stated simply, Jerusalem will cease to be Arab. Whether its Muslim and Christian monuments survive or not will depend on the course that Israeli society takes. Currently, its future is contested between right-wing and centrist Zionists, the former dedicated to radical solutions including the construction of a Temple on the site of *Al-Haram Al-Sharif*. The centrists will permit Palestinians a measure of autonomy in areas of their demographic concentration, and allow Gaza to emerge as the centrepiece of a demilitarised 'Palestinian state'. Arabs of Palestine will become an increasingly proletarianised people, living in a permanent limbo, neither sovereign nor citizens of the Jewish State. The Arab world as a whole will fare a little better. In time, encircled by Israel and Turkey, between whom a powerful alliance is being forged with Washington's help, Syria may cave in to Israel's hegemony. So will Lebanon and Jordan. Egypt will come under permanent pressure to collaborate with Israeli power; as such, it will likely suffer periodic assaults and interventions.

Gradually, Israel will seek to replace American power in the Middle East. The rhetoric of lasting friendship and strategic alliance notwithstanding, its linkages with the United States may be as tenuous as they ultimately proved to be with its original sponsor, Great Britain. Like all great or aspiring powers, Israel knows that friendships and enmities change; only interests are permanent. But to break out of its American dependency, Israel needs to develop commercial ties in the Middle East and Central Asia, and eventually domination of the Gulf, which alone can assure it leverage in its relationship with Europe. Seemingly, these are impossible goals, but Zionism and Israel have been adept at long-term strategic planning, and possess the discipline and perseverance to pursue a plan "acre by acre, goat by goat" as Chaim Weizman put it. That is how the impossible becomes achievable. It has reason to feel that it is completing the conquest of Palestine. So Israel is already launched on the path of its ultimate ambition, which is to dominate the Arab world as thoroughly as it is possible in the contemporary world system.

These are conditions that a proud and sensitive people cannot accept without protest and violence. In the Middle East of the last three decades, there has been a correlation between the advance of Israeli and American power and resurgence of radical discontent. Inevitably, as Arab governments confront internal challenges, interested powers will try to stay in the saddle while changing horses. The darkness of dependency and powerlessness, more profound and blinding than today's, threatens to engulf the Arabs. No one but they can turn the tide.

Only Arab governments and people can defeat Israel's design, and ensure their future as a sovereign people with mastery over their national life and resources. Their immediate challenge is to evolve strategies of survival and success, to confront the imminent menace and strive to achieve, if not the ideal historical outcome, then at least one capable of assuring a tolerable and dignified future to Arab peoples. To approach a meaningful strategy for survival and sovereignty, three questions must be analysed in a dispassionate and informed fashion. Broadly, they relate, first, to the nature, political cultures and divisions in the Israeli state and society; second, to the interests, assumptions, and style of American power in the Middle East; third, to the sources of renewal and change in the Arab world.

Are there ways to negotiate between the present and the future, between what is necessary and what is possible? These are questions that should concern Middle Eastern governments as much as its intelligentsia. The current trends, after all, are no less injurious to the interests of contemporary Arab rulers than they are to the future of the region and its people. Hopefully, there exists a shared commitment to seeking a strategy for survival and sovereignty.


Israeli border police turn away a Palestinian woman at the checkpoint between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The security measures imposed on the West Bank and Gaza have become more stringent as the Jewish Passover holiday approaches *(photo: AFP)*

Turning point or travesty?

Was Monday's agreement between the Sudanese government and southern Sudanese factions a historical landmark or a farce? asks **Gamal Nkrumah**

The discontent running through Sudan today means that the Sudanese government must make a show of doing something. And Khartoum did throw a big party on Monday evening but the doors were only open for Khartoum's southern Sudanese allies. Basically, it made peace with those already won over to the government's side.

The Sudanese government signed a peace agreement with several armed southern Sudanese factions in the presidential palace on Monday. Presidents Felix Patasse of the Central African Republic and Idris Deby of Chad were present. Both Central Africa and Chad share long borders with Sudan. High-level officials from South Africa, Iran and Malaysia witnessed the signing ceremony and other representatives of Islamic and African countries were present. Former United States President Jimmy Carter only just missed the signing ceremony because he left Khartoum for the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa for talks with the Sudanese opposition and Ethiopian authorities. The peripatetic former president was on yet another Sudan peace mission.

Sudanese Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Gabriel Rorich told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "the agreement provided for a referendum on self-determination of southern Sudan after a four-year interim period during which a 25-member coordinating council will run the affairs of southern Sudan. The council will be made up of the current governors of the 10 southern states, with the chairman and deputy chairman and other members appointed by Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir."

Rorich is an ethnic Dinka from the area of Bahr Al-Ghazzal Province now called Lakes State, but he has never joined the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) — the main armed group fighting the government. The SPLA, headed by John Garang, refused to sign the agreement and has resolutely turned down the Sudanese government's peace overtures on the grounds that they are not practical proposals. The SPLA has been making considerable military advances in eastern and southern Sudan. Why should they sign an agreement to the advantage of the government when they are winning the war?

Khartoum's hope is that inter-factional fighting among southerners spells disaster for the southern Sudanese secessionist cause. Pro-government Kerubino Kuanyen signed the agreement for the Bahr Al-Ghazzal breakaway SPLA faction. Arok Ton Arok did the same for the Bor group, another SPLA breakaway group, while the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) was represented by Riek Machar. Kuaj Mekwai signed for the Independence Movement; Topolos Ochang for the Equatoria Defence Force (EDF); and Samuel Aru for the United Sudanese African Party (USAP). Mohamed Haroun Kafe, leader of a Nuba faction, also signed the accord.

Rorich, also the Anglican Bishop of the southern town of Rumbek, stressed that the agreement, "stipulated that Islam and the traditional African religions will be the main sources of legislation in Sudan and that individual states of a Sudanese federation will be free to make amendments."

The adoption of provisions relating to provincial powers, however, rests largely on tribal considerations. But Monday's agreement does appear to be a self-inflicted blow against the centralisation of the Sudanese government's powers. Regional powers are to be tolerated because the war is emptying state coffers and not because anything in them is fundamentally in conflict with Islamist principles.

"I believe strongly that the government will not dishonour the agreement. There are so many social and economic problems in Sudan today that everybody realises that we need peace. The war in the south must stop. There is too much suffering and many people are dying. We cannot have development and war," Rorich stated. Over 1.5 million people have perished as a direct result of the war in southern Sudan. Observers and relief agencies believe that the number could be much higher.

Sudanese opposition forces dismissed Monday's agreement as a government ruse to gain time because it is losing on the battleground. "The militaristic NIF regime can never produce anything of a 'multi' nature," said Farouk Abu Eissa, a Cairo-based spokesman of the National Democratic Alliance — the Sudanese opposition umbrella grouping — and head of the Arab Lawyers' Union. Abu Eissa told the *Weekly* that "the agreement cannot change the facts on the ground."

Daniel Kodi, the SPLA representative in Cairo, was more blunt. "This is a rubbish peace agreement. The war is going on and escalating every day regardless of the agreement. The SPLA rejects Monday's agreement. If the so-called SSIM stands for independence then there is no need to have an interim four-year period for the people of southern Sudan to decide if and when to secede. We [the SPLA] are on the outskirts of Juba, the southern capital. We are working hard to capture Juba in the coming few weeks. So they [the southern Sudanese splinter factions that have signed an agreement with Khartoum] will have no capital. They are trying to deceive the Sudanese people and the outside world. They are part and parcel of the NIF regime. They work for the regime and have no credibility," Kodi told the *Weekly*.

"Even Numeiri's agreement was far better than this agreement. This agreement is not going to bring about peace in Sudan. Numeiri's agreement was not perfect, but it resulted in a period of peace. There is no comparison between this farce and Numeiri's 1972 agreement which failed only when Numeiri backtracked from the stipulation of the agreement and reneged on his word," Kodi explained.

Kodi stressed that the Sudanese government is doing its utmost to split southern Sudanese along ethnic lines. Evidence of ethnic conflict is weak on the ground. Warlords, like Kuanyen and Machar do try to rally tribal support but their efforts seem to bear little fruit. Without Khartoum's help there is little they can do. Kuanyen is a Dinka, like Garang, but many Nuer are among Garang's staunchest supporters. For instance, "James Oath, SPLA deputy chief of staff and acting SPLA minister of foreign affairs, is an ethnic Nuer," Kodi said.

Does Monday's agreement bear any resemblance to the one signed by former Sudanese President Gaafar Al-Numeiri in 1972 with southern factions? Not quite. Andrew Wieu is a former minister of coordination in the presidency, deputy speaker of the Sudanese National Assembly during Numeiri's regime and a regional minister of education. Wieu, a veteran southern Sudanese politician now residing in Cairo told the *Weekly* that, "the difference is that Numeiri was trying to sign a deal with the whole southern secessionist movement and not with certain parties only. Numeiri was, before the institution of the September laws [which ushered in Islamic governance in Sudan], seen by southerners as sincere in his effort to strengthen a constitutionally secular Sudan. The present Islamist regime is not regarded as sincere by the majority of southerners. Those who signed Monday's agreement are sellouts to the cause of democracy and secularism in Sudan. They betray the southern Sudanese cause," Wieu said.

Forcibly ousted, forcibly returned

Libyan authorities forcibly removed 200 Palestinians stranded on the border between Libya and Egypt following a reported deal between the Libyan government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. **Khaled Dawoud** investigates

According to a statement released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, the Libyan authorities last week removed the 200 Palestinians stranded on the border with Egypt for 22 months to a military compound in the Libyan city of Tobruk, 140 kilometres west of the Egyptian border.

The statement added that "according to information collected by the UNHCR mission that proceeded to Salloum, there was some resistance among the Palestinians." However, no excessive use of violence was reported and nobody was injured, the statement said.

According to the statement, the UNHCR regional representative in Cairo together with the organisation's liaison officer in Tripoli held meetings on 6-7 April with senior Libyan officials in which the plight of the stranded Palestinians was discussed. The Libyan minister of interior reportedly "emphasised that the border camp should be closed for security reasons."

The minister added that when the Palestinians return to Libya, they would be allowed to work, their children would have access to education and that they would not be persecuted for any statements they made while on the border.

The 200 Palestinians, under the eyes of Libyan security, had settled in the border area since Libyan leader Muammer Gaddafi decided in September 1995 to expel all 30,000 Palestinians working in Libya.

The move, Gaddafi said, aimed at showing the world the "fallacy" of the Oslo peace accords reached between the PLO and Israel in 1993, as this agreement does not guarantee the right of return for the four million Palestinians forced to leave Palestine following the creation of Israel in 1948 and the 1967 war.

Gaddafi cancelled the work contracts of most Palestinians, including doctors, engineers, teachers and workers, forcing many of them to leave Libya for the countries they originally came from. The majority of Palestinians ended up in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

The Libyan authorities encouraged nearly 1,000 Palestinians to move to the camp it built on the Egyptian-Libyan border in late 1995 to show that Palestinians in Libya supported Gaddafi's call for their right to return to their homeland. Following pressure from Egypt and several Arab governments, however, many of these Palestinians were pulled back into Libya, and the 200 removed on April 18 were those who said they had nowhere to go.

These Palestinians insisted they did not want to return to Libya because they would be jobless and humiliated there, and no other Arab country showed readiness to receive them. For their part, Libyan authorities accused the camp residents of refusing to leave the camp because they were making money out of contraband trade between Egypt and Libya.

Israel, meanwhile, banned entry to the self-rule areas in the West Bank and Gaza to nearly all Palestinians coming from Libya, including many who possessed temporary residence permits, known among Palestinians as the "white card." Israel feared they would stay in the West Bank and Gaza indefinitely. Several pleas by the stranded Palestinians to the international community to pressure Israel to accept their entry to the self-rule areas were ignored by Tel Aviv.

Meanwhile, what Gaddafi intended as an anti-Israel show backfired when several Arab governments, human rights groups and members of the Palestinian National Authority criticised the harsh living conditions of the Palestinians living on the border.

As a result of this mounting criticism, the Libyan Peoples' General Congress, the Libyan parliament, issued a decision in January asking all Palestinians on the border to return to Libya. When Libyan representatives went to the border a few days later to "convince" the Palestinians to return to Libya — accompanied by a few hundred Palestinians loyal to the Libyan government — they were met by hostile camp residents carrying knifes and iron rods. They repeated their stand that the only place they wanted to go to was Palestine.

Apparently the camp residents were not able to resist last Friday when they were asked to move, reportedly under the threat of machine guns and armed Libyan soldiers and intelligence. The UNHCR statement said that the organisation's office in Tripoli was "closely liaising with the Libyan government in order to have access to the refugees in Tobruk and monitor their situation."

هكذا من الأصل



Somalia back on stage

Gamal Nkrumah met Hussein Aidid, son and political heir of the late Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid — the thorn in the flesh of the UN intervention force in Somalia

Aidid, the father, led the way for his son Hussein to make his name in the treacherous arena of Somali politics. Hussein is a youthful looking 35-year-old man. During his visit to Cairo last week, he was referred *to by his entourage as "the President".* Free elections have not been held in Somalia since 1969, however. The crusade by Hussein's father against the United Nations and foreign interference in Somalia's affairs *was cut short and he was* killed with his full potential apparently unfulfilled. Can his second son carry out his mission? He should, barring a fateful mishap like the one that killed his father, canter through to *become Somalia's popularly elected* president. But, nobody has a clue when free and fair elections might be held in Somalia.

Twenty-one months ago, Hussein inherited the chairmanship of the United So*mali Congress-Somali* National *Alliance* (USC-SNA), a political party dominated by members of the Habr-Gedir clan of the Hawiye tribe — the largest of the six major tribal groupings ethnic Somalis are divided into. A couple of *days after his father's* death, the USC-SNA unanimously declared Hussein as their new leader. At the head of this disparate alliance, the former United States marine has achieved more than *might have been expected.*

Mohamed Farah Aidid's iron will was instrumental in the ousting of former Somali President Mohamed Siad Barre in January 1991 and again in throwing out the US-led UN troops from Somalia. The US had a $25,000 reward out for General Aidid's capture "dead or alive" but the UN un*ceremoniously vacated Somalia in 1994.* Aidid had unilaterally declared himself president of Somalia. Can his son Hussein follow suit?

The younger Aidid was cast in at the deep *end of Somali tribal politics but Somalia to*day is a more peaceful land. "When Hussein first inherited his father's mantle, the rival warlords thought that they could happily go about their business of ruining Somalia. But, soon it became clear that Aidid junior was as resolute as Aidid senior. His first months in office were spent *consolidating his power. He managed to* rally around him the USC and was unanimously proclaimed chairman of the USC and president of Somalia," a seasoned Somali politician residing in Cairo told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. We looked on as Hussein Aidid entered the hotel lobby. He was greeted with a chorus of Arabic and Somali good wishes and proffered handshakes from the two dozen Somalis waiting to meet him. The self-styled president of Somalia sported an impressive walking stick, his father's.

Abutting on the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, Somalia has one of the longest coastlines in Africa. It embraces the largest land mass of the Horn of Africa, shaped like a *great rhinoceros horn jutting into the Indian* Ocean towards Asia. And, today, with the West sidelining the war-torn East African country, Somalia seems to be reaching further east in its quest for economic salvation. *Somalia's strategic location — the closest* Africa comes to the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf, the Indian sub-continent and the Far East — has attracted entrepreneurs from Asia from the earliest times. Somalia *occupies the territory of the fabled land of* Punt, *with which Ancient Egyptian Queen* Hatshepsut did brisk business.

"I have met a number of Egyptian businessmen and already *four Egyptian com*panies are interested in the reconstruction *effort," Hussein Aidid told the Weekly. He* is on a tour of the Arab countries to drum up support for his battle-torn country. From Egypt, Aidid flew *to Yemen where many* Somali refugees have taken shelter.

It seems that the *main investors in the So*mali reconstruction programme are fellow Muslims and newly-industrialised South-East Asian nations like Malaysia and Indonesia. The process of reintegrating Somal*ia into the world economy has hardly begun,* but Aidid insisted that the foundations are now being laid for a prosperous Somalia.

Fresh opportunities in reconstruction make up for the destruction of the past. As *privatisation and market reforms take root,* rich overseas Somalis are expected to come up with the capital needed for essential infrastructural investments. Somalia is now recovering from decades of destructive and *demoralising dictatorship, tribalism and* clan warfare.

In Somalia, political groups generally coincide with clan and tribal affiliation. "The differences between the various Somali *tribes, clans and warring factions* are superficial. These differences are accentuated by outsiders. We have settled most of them. Today, *we have good relations with the* UN. We provide security for the UN personnel in Somalia. The UN used to behave like a state within a state. They did not respect Somalis and ignored Somali culture," *Aidid told the Weekly.*

"My father had differences with the US over the role of the UN and its interference in Somalia. The UN were experimenting in Somalia and overlooked the fact that Somalia is a sovereign nation. That was the first time in history in which the UN used force. The UN failed because it was no business of the UN to interfere in Somalia. They failed to understand the African and Islamic roots of Somali culture," Aidid said.

"The UN has taken all our airport equip*ment. Traffic controls and radars were con*fiscated by the UN. Today, they are stored in Mombasa, Kenya, and Naples, Italy. The UN left us nothing. They've stripped us of all our national assets. We cannot service Mogadishu international airport," *said* Aidid. Things are looking up, however. Aidid went on: "Malaysia promised to rebuild and re-equip our airport and ports within the next six months. The Malaysians prom*ised my late father assistance* and a month ago a high-powered Malaysian delegation visited Somalia and promised us economic and technical assistance. Their help has no strings attached. The Malaysians have lived up to their pledge of support."

After several high-level visits by Malaysian government officials and business*men in 1996, Malaysia pledged to construct* an Islamic commercial bank, a hospital and a telecommunications centre in Mogadishu. "Our telephone system is today better than any of our East African neighbours. Our infrastructure was completely destroyed. We have to build everything from scratch. Malaysia helped us establish a new and ultra-modern telecommunications system. There are two other Somali private telephone sys*tems in the country today. All this was ac*complished without aid in the last 21 months," Aidid explained.

Does Aidid need to get much tougher with his rivals? *And what about a future* face-off with Ali Mahdi Mohamed leader *of the rival Somali Salvation Alliance?* Aidid was rather evasive. "Ali Mahdi Mohamed is my brother. We hope to settle lingering disputes. *We don't bear him any* grudges," Aidid said. Aidid must work together with Mohamed *for Somalia* to function as a viable nation.

Aidid is trying to position himself as a key player whom the international community cannot afford to ignore. So where *does Aidid get his weapons from?* "We are never short of weapons in Somalia. The 35,000 UN troops stationed in the country at one time left us enough weapon supplies," Aidid said. "Also during the 21 years of *[former Somali President] Said* Barre's dictatorship, defense spending was over 50 per cent of our national budget," Aidid added. Somalia is, then, awash with outdated weapons, but what about *modern weapons?* "Even if we could lay hands on modern weapons, we still have to find bullets and ammunition for the *new weaponry,"* Aidid *said. "We use* what we have," he added.

Hussein Aidid grew up in the same Mogadishu neighbourhood as his wife Ayan, the daughter of Somalia's first na*val general Ali Hasbi Elmi.* Ayan is a computer programmer. They met again after their childhood days in San Jose, California, and were married in Mogadishu in 1995, a few months before *Hussein's father's death. Both Hussein* and Ayan are representative of a new generation of younger Somalis — cosmopolitan political and economic exiles who are as much at home in the West as in their native Somalia. Aidid has six brothers and seven sisters, most of them in the US. Hassan, his older brother, is in California and so is his mother Asli.

Aidid is an unabashed free-marketeer. In Somalia, the pace of foreign financial investment has been closely linked to the rate of privatisation. Aidid conceded that *Somalia's largely privatised economy* still needs large infusions of capital. Some of this capital will have to come from foreign sources but much will come from domestic sources. But he will have to do a great deal more to realise that project.

"There is a communications gap with some countries, including Saudi Arabia. The Saudis and other Gulf states think that we do not have potential. I want to reassure our Arab brethren in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf that Somalia is a country with enormous economic potential," Aidid said. "I spoke with Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel-Meguid and with the Arab ambassadors in Cairo. I told them that the security situation in Somalia is under control," Aidid said.

In a flurry of behind-the-scenes diplomatic activity, Egypt is launching a quiet and low-profile campaign to bring Somali leaders round to the negotiating *table. "We are speaking to the various* Somali leaders," explained Marawan Badr, assistant foreign minister for African affairs. "We realise that Somalia has great economic potential and stra*tegic importance,"* Badr added.



Jerusalem in Seoul

The stalled Middle East peace process dominated discussions of parliamentarians in Seoul, writes **Sami Metwalli** *from the Korean capital*

The 97th Inter-Parliamentary Conference took place earlier this month in the capital of the Republic of Korea. The stalled *Middle East peace process* dominated discussions. South Korean President Kim Young Sam kicked off the conference with a powerful plea for the *various democratisation* processes to be taken more seriously around the world.

Parliamentary representatives from some 120 countries *attended to discuss such wide* ranging issues as the crises in Zaire and Albania, the conflict in the Korean Peninsula, development strategies and the World Trade Organisation.

Leading the Egyptian delegation was Fathi Sorour, *the speaker of the Egyptian* parliament and the head of the World Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The conference reaffirmed its *support for the Middle East* Peace process and stressed its adherence to the resolutions adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to bolster efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East. When the issue of Jerusalem was raised, 775 votes were cast in support of the resolution denouncing the Israeli authorities for impinging on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people *and the construction of Jewish* settlements in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Those voting against the resolution numbered 178 and there were 184 abstentions.

The conference *supported* the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions calling for the revocation of all Israeli action designed to alter the *legal* status, the demographic composition and geographical *structure* of Jerusalem. Delegates expressed grave concern at the new settlement activities in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 and in *particular at the construction of* a settlement at the Jebel Abu Ghneim area in *East Jerusalem.* They stressed that the settlements are illegal and in *breach of international law and* a major obstacle to peace. The participants also expressed concern over the difficulties facing the Middle East peace *process and their negative* impact on the living conditions of all people in the region, specifically the Palestinians.

The conference unanimously deplored the increasing recourse to violence since the dangerous stalling of the peace process. Participants called upon Israel as the occupying *power to abide scrupulously* by its legal obligations under the Hague Convention and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949. The delegates also called *upon the Israeli* government to refrain from confiscating the identity cards of the Palestinian citizens of Jerusalem and to revoke the policy that prevents them from repairing their homes or building new ones to meet their urgent housing needs.

Delegates appealed to the UN to use its influence to protect all citizens, institutions and historical monuments in Jerusalem, and particularly the Palestinian institutions pending the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution *242 and the achievement of* peace.

Gujral at the helm

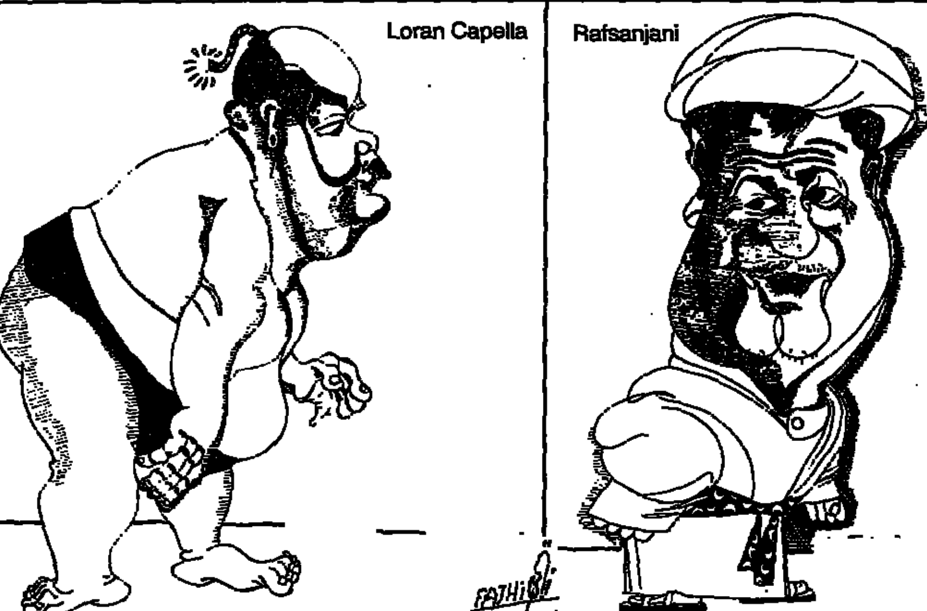
INDER Kumar Gujral, India's foreign minister for the past 10 months, was sworn in as the new Indian premier on Monday. The 77-year-old Gujral is no stranger to politics. A former Communist student activist against the British Raj, Gujral has held ministerial positions seven times before, both as *a Congress Party politician under the administration of Indira Gandhi in the 1970s and later as a Jan*ata Dal Party member. Gujral's brave stand against Indira Gandhi's "Emergency" rule in 1975 cost him his job and won him much respect throughout the vast country.

Gujral was India's ambassador to the former Soviet Union between 1976 and 1980 at a time when Moscow was India's most important ally. He was born in 19 in Jhelum, now in the Pakistani Punjab, and *Gujral has vowed* to make rapprochement with *Pakistan his top priority. Gujral will be meeting* the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a fellow Punjabi, next month in the summit meeting of the South Asian nations in the Maldives.

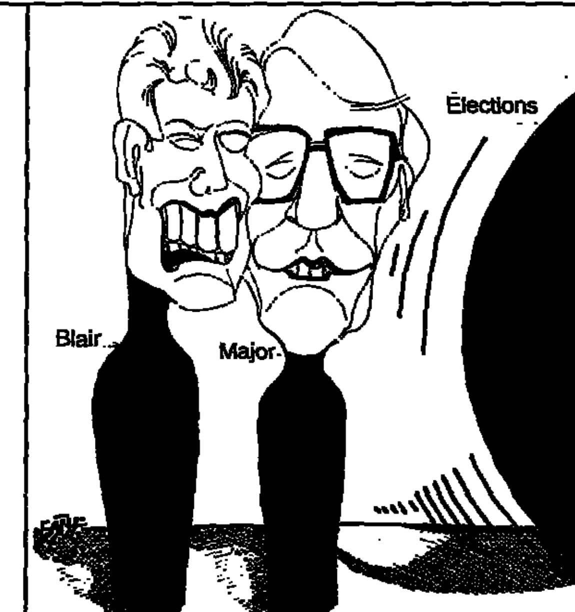
Gujral is expected to toe the party line on economic affairs and go along with the economic deregulation and reform programmes. However, Gujral is known to champion traditional leftist causes such as poverty eradication, social welfare, and improvements *in health and education.*

Bust-up in Lima

Seventy-two hostages were freed in Peru, reversing the fortunes of President Fujimori. **Gamal Nkrumah** reviews the four-month long crisis







"Four months ago, on 17 December 1996, 15 Tupac Amaru fighters seized the *Japanese ambassador's residence in Peru during* a cocktail party marking the Japanese emperor's birthday and took some 500 hostages. I was among them. There was an unnerving *climate of terror.* Within hours, the women including the mother and sister of Peru's President Alberto Fujimori were un*conditionally released," Ambassador Sami Tawfik told Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone conversation from Lima. He had served for 35 years in the Foreign Office, and had never seen anything like it.

Last week, Peruvian Interior Minister General Juan Briones and Police Chief General Ketin Vidal resigned. The popularity of President Fujimori plummeted. Vidal *masterminded the capture* in 1992 of Abimael Gutzman, the leftist *Sendrero Luminoso*, Shinning Path leader. The freeing of the hostages reversed Fujimori's fortunes.

So how did the Peruvian special force storm the residence so easily on Tuesday night, killing all the captors and losing only two men — including Fujimori's *son's personal bodyguard? How* did all the hostages except one get away alive? One hostage, Supreme Court Justice Carlos Giusti, and two Peruvian soldiers were killed in the mid-day *lightning assault. All the* kidnappers, including the Tupac Amara leader Nestor Cerpa were shot dead.

"According to my friend, the Bolivian ambassador to Peru, Eloy Avila, who *was among the last hostages to be freed,* at least half of the kidnappers routinely played soccer every day at midday. At that time, the hostages were always sent to the first floor of the mansion, *while the rest of the kidnappers* stayed on the ground floor. Ten minutes before the storming of the residence, the Peruvian military *sent a coded message* to the hostages. Eight kidnappers, *including their leader Nestor Cerpa,* were playing soccer. They were caught unaware, playing soccer," ambassador Tawfik told the *Weekly*.

How did he feel when he was *first kidnapped?* "The Egyptian Embassy is not far from the Japanese ambassador's residence. So when we heard the blasts during the cocktail party, I thought that it was a *Middle Eastern terror*ist attack. Then I realised that the sound and smoke came from the Japanese residence itself. I was shocked and very fearful. The next few days were the worst in my life," *Tawfik said.*

However, there were telling signs that the kidnappers were not very professional. On 31 December, over 20 journalists took the *Tupac Amaru* fighters by *surprise and entered* the compound. They held an impromptu press conference.

Meanwhile, the president's daughter presented *the kidnappers* with roast turkey on Christmas Day and the Red Cross delivered chocolate eggs for Easter. After initial hesitation, Fujimori eventually agreed to talk to the leftist Tupac Amaru who accused Fujimori's *free-market* reforms of benefiting only Peru's rich.

On 3 March Fujimori made a surprise trip to Cuba to meet with President Fidel Castro who offered asylum to the kidnappers. But Cerpa scoffed at the idea telling reporters that the only place he would like to be after the crisis is *over is Peru's Amazonian jungle.*

The Tupac Amaru is estimated to have about 1,000 fighters, far less than the main Peruvian leftist organisation, the *Maoist Shining Path* which is said to have 10,000 fighters. Tupac Amaru is named after an indigenous Peruvian Indian who led a failed uprising against the Spanish conquerors of Peru in 1780.

Tokyo expressed regret over the use of force. But Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto conceded that, "there *should* be nobody *who could* criticise Fujimori." The Japanese Ambassador to Peru, Morihisa Aoki, suffered an elbow injury during the rescue operation. Japan counselled caution throughout the hostage crisis and pleaded for a peaceful solution. In the end, Japan's wishes were ignored and Fujimori's gamble paid off. All 24 Japanese *hostages were rescued. "Japan was not informed in advance* and *this is re*grettable," said the prime minister. The compound is, technically speaking, Japanese soil.

While Japan was not informed of the rescue operation by the 150-strong assault team, it appears that the United States was. Observers believe that the US actually masterminded the bust up. The US State Department stressed that Tupac Amaru must bear full responsibility for the crisis.

Those *released include Peru's Foreign Minister Fransisco Tudela, the* Peruvian president's brother, Santiago Fujimori, and several top-level Peruvian military and civilian officials and businessmen. Fujimori, who is of Japanese descent, *emerged* as the winner in the toughest *crisis of his sev*en-year presidency. Less than an hour after the busting of the compound of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, he was triumphantly touring his capital with released hostages and their rescuers. The Marxist guerrilla group has already pledged to take revenge.

"We *have been following closely* the *Peruvian* hostage crisis from the beginning. The Egyptian ambassador was among the hostages but fortunately he was among the third batch of hostages released after a few days in captivity. *He has been sending us regular and updated reports on* the hostage crisis," assistant foreign minister for latin American affairs, Rakha Hassan, told the *Weekly*.

Hassan last visited Peru in 1984, but he served in Chile between 1984-88 and in Mexico between 1979-83. He has visited many Latin American countries and is widely acknowledged as a key authority on Latin American affairs in Egypt today. "There are only eight Egyptian nationals in Peru, and the volume of trade between the two countries is not large — two-way trade is less than $1 million," he said.

Trade between Egypt and some other Latin American countries like Brazil and Argentina is substantial — comparable to that between Egypt and some neighbouring Middle Eastern countries. Two-way trade figures between Egypt and Brazil and Argentina is $300 million and $320 million respectively. "We import a wide range of tropical food and agricultural products from Brazil and beef, wheat and nuclear technology from Argentina. We hope to increase the volume of trade between countries like Peru and the hostage crisis has focused world attention on the considerable economic potential of the rapidly growing Latin American economies," Hassan said.

According to Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, Peru attracted more direct foreign investment last year than Russia — $2.9 billion for Peru versus $2.2 billion for Russia.

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Ailing trade firms face privatisation

Unable to survive in a free market environment, public sector foreign trade companies are heavily in debt and stand charged of financial mismanagement and corruption. Privatisation may be their last resort

The People's Assembly Economic Committee is currently reviewing the economic conditions of six foreign trade companies facing financial crisis both from the government's liberalisation measures and the market conditions created by Law 203 of 1992.

Fueling the parliamentary debate was a recent report submitted by the Central Auditing Agency (CAA). The report not only highlighted the six companies' weak financial and administrative structure, but also painted a gloomy picture of their future performance on foreign markets. Privatisation, argued the report, might be the only panacea for these companies. The companies include the El-Nasr Import and Export Company, Misr Export-Import Company, Misr Foreign Trade Company and Arab Foreign Trade Company.

To that end, the government two weeks ago drew up a privatisation programme for the six companies. Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid said that Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, during his recent visit to South-East Asia, invited investors from Malaysia, Singapore and China to invest in these six companies. This move is designed to enable the ailing companies to make use of the South-East Asian businessmen's extensive experience in upgrading administrative and financial systems of foreign trade companies. It also seeks to promote their export potential in foreign markets. The Asian investors, Ebeid indicated, will be eligible to collect a percentage of the expected profits.

According to the CAA report, which reviewed the financial situation of the six foreign trade companies in fiscal year 94/1995, these firms suffered when they were forced to compete with private foreign trade companies in a newly-liberalised business environment. In the past, these firms had enjoyed huge state subsidies, easy access to credit facilities and banking loans and a monopoly of the representation of foreign companies in Egypt. Consequently, they were unprepared for the changes that have come about of late.

Members of the parliamentary economic committee, most of them businessmen in their own right, further noted that these companies, in an attempt to reduce their losses, opted to hand over the credit facilities provided to them by public banks to a number of private sector exporters and importers. In exchange, they received hefty commissions.

"Things, however, turned out to be much worse when most of these private sector exporters and importers went bankrupt and failed to pay their debts to the companies," said Abdel-Rahman Baraka, an MP for the Daqahliya Governorate.

For example, said Baraka, El-Nasr Import and Export Company (NIEC), an affiliate of the Cotton and International Trade Holding Company (CITHC), gave businesswoman Mona El-Shafie millions of pounds in credit facilities to import huge consignments of wheat last year against hefty commissions. "Although El-Shafie failed to undertake the whole operation, because of corruption on the part of leading NIEC officials she was able once again to have easy access to more credit," said Baraka. "When the new NIEC chairman took over, however, he was amazed at the amount El-Shafie owed the company and referred the matter to prosecutors."

According to the CAA's report, the gradual deterioration in NIEC's marketing capacities over the last few years resulted in an eight per cent increase in the company's unsold inventory and the rocketing in its marketing and administrative costs. In fiscal year 1994-95, NIEC's production covered only 74 per cent of the total costs and its volume of direct exports dropped significantly due to the fact that the company's branches in 27 foreign countries failed to boost Egyptian exports on these markets.

"Even NIEC's two branches in Syria and Sierra Leone, which realised profits in 1993 of LE48,000 and LE50,000, incurred losses of LE102,000 and LE76,000 in 1994-95 respectively," the report said. Despite these losses, the report stated, the company's board continued to provide a number of inefficient private importers with huge amounts of credit.

"As a result, the company suffered from a severe shortage of financial liquidity and increasingly had to depend on banking overdraft borrowing, which increased to LE96.9 million at the end of June 1995," said the CAA's report.

A second company, the Misr Export and Import Company (MEIC) which is also an affiliate of the CITHC, faced similar problems. According to the CAA's report, MEIC's volume of direct exports fell to LE11.6 million in 1995, and it almost lost some of its most important foreign markets, namely Germany, Spain and Lebanon. Further compounding matters, MEIC is burdened with LE38.5 million in banking overdraft borrowing, and as much as LE7.7 million in interest on bank loans. Additionally, the value of its unsold inventory increased by LE1.3 million in June 1995.

The situation for the Misr Foreign Trade Company (MFTC), an affiliate of the Egyptian Transport, Services and Trade Holding Company (ETSTHC), is no better than that of the other two. MFTC's total volume of exports to foreign markets fell from LE4 million in 1994 to a mere LE500,000 in June 1995, said the CAA's report. In addition, stated the report, its 1994-95 import operations incurred a staggering loss of LE5.2 million, although its commissions on indirect exports and imports (collected from private firms) climbed from LE3.5 million in 1994 to LE4 million in 1995. The CAA report also concluded that although MFTC has bank deposits of LE23.2 million, it owes to these institutions as much as LE114.4 million in debts and overdraft borrowing.

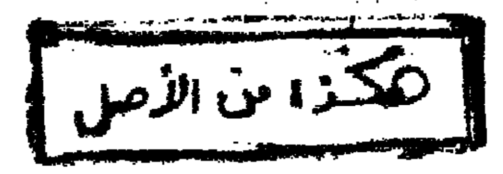
Also joining the rat-pack is the Arab Foreign Trade Company (AFTC), which registered an eight per cent drop in its sales volume and a 2.3 per cent decline in its volume of exports in June 1995. The reason, said the CAA report, is that AFTC lost all of its Asian markets. Moreover, the value of the company's unsold inventory climbed to LE5.7 million by June 1995, while its cash liquidity dropped from 1.2 per cent to 0.5 per cent in the same time frame.

Presented with these figures during a recent parliamentary meeting, the chairmen of these companies claimed that the decline in the competitive capacities of the foreign trade firms is largely due to the decline in Egypt's export potential as a whole.

The AFTC's chairman, Gaballah Abdel-Fattah, argued that the CAA's report addresses the foreign trade companies' economic conditions two years ago and does not reflect the current situation. "The condition of these companies has changed significantly since then," said Gaballah.

The majority of MPs, however, were not swayed by this line of argument and, instead, cited corruption as a major reason for the financial dire straits faced by these companies. Moreover, the CAA report, they argue, paints a very realistic and credible picture. "The government should intesify its clamp-down on corruption practices in these companies, and work to improve the performance of their foreign branches," said Abdel-Wahab Qouta, the economic committee's deputy chairman. The majority of MPs, however, insist that privatisation is the best solution for such companies.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Form over content

The belief that the boycott is the Arabs' only weapon in the battle against Israel has led to an unforeseen paradox, writes Lutfi El-Kholi: the adamant refusal to acknowledge Israel implies a rejection of the Palestinians' daily struggle against oppression

"Stop normalisation," urge the Arab intellectuals who have opted to sit on the sidelines of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to watch as a peaceful settlement is reached. There are two groups of sideliners: one holds that "war is impossible, but peace is surrender," while the other asks: "No one is against peace — but what kind of peace?" Both insist that normalisation is the Arabs' only means of leverage in the struggle against Israel. *If it is relinquished, the resulting peace will be* one which violates Arab rights.

In principle, I have no bones to pick with this group over the importance of normalisation at this juncture in the Arab-Israeli peace process. I do not believe, however, that normalisation is an end in itself. Normalisation is a weapon to be used in order to achieve certain aims in a particularly fierce political confrontation; it is therefore essential that we use it properly. To keep the sword sheathed ultimately blunts it. What, after all, is the use of a weapon, regardless of how powerful it might be, if it is not put to use?

The obsession with the normalisation weapon has generated a sort of paralysis when it comes to using it practically and effectively against Israel. *This paralysis has produced exaggerated* and inaccurate estimations of the actual power of normalisation, and even its very nature. As a result, fantasy and reason have merged in the minds and actions of the sideliners. It is reasonable, for example, to assume that normalisation comprises trade and cultural exchange. It is not reasonable to assume, as some Arab intellectuals do, that watching Israeli television programmes received through satellite dishes in one's home in Cairo, Amman or Damascus constitutes a form of pernicious normalisation with the enemy.

I believe the origins of the issue date back to the Arab League resolution adopted after the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 to "boycott the enemy" within the framework of a comprehensive *Arab confrontation against Israel*. This boycott was to comprise all domains of possible interaction at all levels. Each member nation of the Arab League promulgated a national de*cree to that effect. Egypt, for example, issued Law 506 of 1955* after which it passed further legislation to tighten the boycott.

The boycott operated on three levels. The first was a total, direct national boycott of Israel. The second and third levels involved boycotting international organisations and institutions that deal with Israel. The provisions of the boycott remained in virtually full effect until the ratification of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty on 26 March 1979. It was Article 2 of this treaty that mentioned, for the first time in the history of the conflict, "the establishment of normal relations" between both parties. The third appendix comprised a "protocol for relations between both parties" which stipulated "the end of the boycott, the elimination of all obstacles of a discriminatory nature between Egypt and Israel and the establishment of normal relations between them." In compliance with this protocol, Egypt promulgated Law 66 of 18 February 1980 to "lift the boycott against Israel."

The term "normalisation" appeared for the first time in Egypt in the Prime Ministerial Decree of 30 October 1979 which *called for the creation of a "General Committee for the Normalisation of Egyptian-Israeli relations."* The committee was initially chaired by Dr Boutros Ghali, then minister of state for foreign affairs, until this position was taken over, in February 1980, by General Kamal Hassan Ali, then minister of defence and war production. In accordance with the decree, the committee was composed of deputy ministers of defence, the interior, economy and foreign commerce, tourism and civil aviation, communications and transport, petroleum and culture in addition to representatives of the General Information Organisation, the National Television and Broadcasting Organisation, the Currency Administration of the Central Bank and members of the Foreign Ministry's Normalisation Committee.

Further official measures towards normalisation between Egypt and Israel were taken at a meeting of delegations from both countries, held from 31 January to 3 February 1980. The delegates agreed to establish a "Joint High Commission for the Normalisation of Relations" and several subsidiary committees composed of the relevant deputy ministers from both sides "with the purpose of implementing the full normalisation of relations in the spirit of the peace treaty concluded between the two countries." These committees produced a range of agree*ments for normalisation in various fields which were eventually* put into effect.

Normalisation, however, faced vehement popular resistance in Egypt and in the Arab world as a whole. The Arab League, which had temporarily relocated its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis, also decided to transfer the headquarters of the Central Committee for the Arab Boycott of Israel to Damascus.

At the same time, with the succession of violent events that followed the assassination of President Sadat and the rise to power of President Mubarak, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in *1982*, the eruption of the Intifada in the Occupied Territories and the escalation of Israeli repression against the Palestinians, Egyptian-Israeli relations entered what was termed "a cold peace." *For all practical purposes, the implementation of the* normalisation agreements floundered, even at the official level.

Since that time, the Egyptian government has pursued a policy that fluctuates between activating and freezing normalisation in various domains. In other words, normalisation has become a means of exerting pressure in the Egyptian government's management of conflict/coexistence with Israel, in keeping with both the peace agreements, on one hand, and Cairo's commitments to the Arabs, and the Palestinians in particular, on the other.

Since the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli peace accords in 1979, normalisation has been restricted to the establishment of normal relations between the two states against a background of popular resistance in Egypt, and governmental and popular resistance in the Arab world as a whole. The purpose of this resistance was simple and straightforward: to strangle the Egyptian-Israeli peace, or at lest to contain it so that it would not extend to other Arab countries. Arab opposition to normalisation entailed freezing Egypt's membership in the Arab League and *boycotting all official Egyptian government agencies as well as* individual Egyptians who supported peace between Egypt and Israel, such as Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz.

This resistance accomplished none of its aims, with the exception perhaps of perpetuating the animosity towards Israel among the majority of the Arab people, an attitude that stems from Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territory, Israel's expansionist and settlement policies and its repressive activities and expropriation of Arab rights.

Egypt eventually regained its membership in the Arab League and the League returned to its permanent headquarters in Cairo. This development, which occurred without Egypt reneging on its commitments to the peace accord with Israel, was the result of unprecedented and sudden changes at the regional and international levels. Prime among them was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent creation of an international political-military alliance to liberate Kuwait. This alliance mobilised the military and financial resources of more than 30 nations, among them Syria and Egypt, under US leadership. Another major development was the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union. Closer to home, and more directly related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, was the Madrid conference.

What is important to us here, in light of these developments, is that the normalisation weapon no longer possesses the power and efficacy it had when the peace process was restricted to the Egyptian-Israeli track. True, it retains significant impact in terms of exerting various forms of pressure on Israel. Yet it is no longer as forceful as the group of Arab intellectuals who have opted to remain on the sidelines of the peace process would like to believe, particularly following Madrid.

To date, the peace process as a whole has produced the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement of 1994, the mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO which gave rise to the Oslo Accords in 1992, the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in Gaza and parts of the West Bank as a step preceding the final phase of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, and projected bilateral negotiations between Israel and Syria. The peace process, however, has and continues to run up against numerous and com*plex difficulties. These are largely due to the profound changes* in the orientation of thought, state and society in Israel, changes that have precipitated fierce clashes between the authorities and the various peace forces inside Israel, on one hand, and between the government and the extremist anti-peace forces on the other, particularly as pertains to the principle of land for peace.

In this framework, three developments within the Arab world have important consequences in terms of normalisation during the peace process. These developments were the accumulated product of international pressure, particularly on the part of the US, and the independent will of a number of Arab regimes.

The first change occurred when the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council lifted the boycott on the international organisations and institutions dealing with Israel. The second involved the exchange of diplomatic and commercial representation offices between five non-front line Arab countries and *Israel in a move toward normalisation in economic and cultural* domains. The third development consisted of the economic summit meetings in Casablanca in 1994, Amman in 1995 and *Cairo in 1996*.

The purpose of these summits, attended by representatives from Israel, Arab countries, the US, Europe and Asia, was to create economic, social and regional networks for the necessary investments in large-scale joint projects in the Middle East that would contribute to and speed up a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli crisis.

These three developments were also crucial in transforming the meaning, content and practice of normalisation. Meanwhile, however, the sideliners clung to their rigid, facile stance, totally oblivious to the change in the conflict during the precarious and complex phase of political settlement.

In other words, normalisation has extended beyond the confines of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty; resistance to normalisation is no longer aimed at aborting this treaty and preventing its extension to the rest of the Arab world. On the contrary, normalisation is a reality at numerous political, economic and cultural levels. This necessitates new ways of using this weapon or refraining from using it.

Moreover, the concept of normalisation has acquired larger dimensions as a result of the international economic pressures leading to the formation of large regional economic blocs, a process that makes national boundaries redundant, and requires *that national economies be assimilated into the international* commercial framework of transnational companies, the GATT and other such organisations. Normalisation is also profoundly affected by the achievements and changes brought about by the revolution in communications technology. Neither the Arabs nor Israel can afford to resist these developments without the risk of international isolation and difficulties in development and progress.

Several international economic reports have estimated that the volume of economic relations between Israel and the Arab world is currently worth approximately half a billion dollars in the form of joint investments and commercial exchanges. Estimates rise to around one billion dollars in indirect normalised commercial and financial relations at the regional and international level. Normalisation has also extended to culture, with joint projects for cooperation between academic research centres and universities. In recent years, too, normalisation has even come to comprise the labour market, with thousands of workers from Egypt, Jordan and Morocco currently employed in Israel. Although we do not have precise figures for the total volume of this labour force, one estimate places the number of Egyptians working in Israel at between ten and fifteen thousand.

Another development tipped the scales in the normalisation balance when the Arab League Council of Ministers voted to freeze all forms of normalisation outside of the scope of the *peace treaties currently in effect with Israel*. This decision, taken in response to the Likud government's violations of the letter and spirit of the peace process, has transformed normalisation into an important Arab weapon against Tel Aviv and not the reverse, as was previously the case. In other words, normalisation has now, for the first time, become a weapon with both offensive and defensive capabilities. The efficacy of this weapon now depends on its accurate deployment. Its potential efficacy was made abundantly clear when the majority of Israeli businessmen began to oppose the government's policies, arguing that they threaten peace, jeopardise Israel's interests and future and could destroy the prospects for Arab-Israeli economic cooperation, particularly in the Gulf."

On the sidelines, however, some still believe that there is a firm and united Arab front against normalisation — this at a time when the Central Office for the Arab Boycott has been un*able to hold a single meeting since 1994 because it was unable* to summon the necessary quorum.

The most insidious form of normalisation, in this perspective, *is communication with Israeli peace activists in order to create* an international and regional alliance at the grassroots level. Perhaps this group is unaware that its absolutist stance against normalisation plays directly into the hands of the Likud. So adamant is it in opposing normalisation that, for reasons of pure formality, it is boycotting the Palestinian people and their daily struggle against Israeli repression.

By ignoring such formalities as entrance visas issued by Israeli embassies, they dissipate the essence of the struggle and disregard their national and Arab duties on behalf of the Palestinian people, taking refuge under pompous slogans and communiqués. Indeed, it is this perpetual obsession with form over content that has led this group of intellectuals to a potentially disastrous conclusion: that the Arabs have no other defence in their confrontation with Israel but the normalisation card.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Mohamed Abduh is a big name in Egypt's 19th century history. He was an innovative reformer, an astute judge, a forward-looking member of the Shura Council (parliament), a top Arabic language scholar and a broad-minded religious leader who served as mufti. He was the prime mover behind the establishment of the Islamic Charity Society, which remains in existence today, providing not only material assistance to the poor but also health services and social care. In this instalment of the *Diwan* series, Dr Yunan Labib Rizk tells the story of Mohamed Abduh, who died in 1905, on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*



Illustration: Makram Henein

Under a bold headline, *Al-Ahram* of 12 July 1905 announced "The Mufti Sheikh Mohamed Abduh passed away. Only God is eternal." The news marked the end, not only of the late mufti, but of a nearly 30-year companionship between Mohamed Abduh and *Al-Ahram*. It began in Sep*tember 1876*, a month after *Al-Ahram* was founded.

When it first introduced Mohamed Abduh to its readers, *Al-Ahram* described him as "the erudite scholar Sheikh Mohamed Abduh, a student at Al-Azhar University."

Between the first article that heralded Mohamed Abduh's rising star and the last article that signalled that star's evanescence, the relationship between *this man and the newspaper remained strong*. That *Al-Ahram* lent its backing to Mohamed Abduh in most of the battles he fought — and the battles were frequent and fierce — offers testimony to this effect. *Al-Ahram* never forgot that both their careers began at the same time. If it frequently reminded its readers of that fact, Mohamed Abduh had no need of a reminder. Even at *Al-Ahram*'s lowest ebb during the Orabi *revolution of which* Mohamed Abduh was a prominent supporter, *Al-Ahram* harboured no rancour against the young Azhar student. The sheikh's nationalist fervour may have inspired him to issue a *fatwa* (religious decree) calling for the deposition of the Khedive Tawfiq whom *Al-Ahram* supported, but at no point did he attempt to tarnish *Al-Ahram*. It was as though he always carried in his heart the birth certificate into *public* life issued for him by the newspaper.

Of course, the newspaper and the imam have had their points of difference. Nevertheless they appeared bound by a unity of purpose and interest. In order to promote his reformist programme, Sheikh Mohamed Abduh retained close personal ties with Lord Cromer, the British high commissioner. In like manner, in order to preserve a larger margin of freedom of expression, *Al-Ahram* protected itself through its affiliation with the French consul. Indeed it was the immunities the newspaper enjoyed under the capitulation system that gave it the manoeuvrability to lend its unstinting support to Mohamed Abduh in his appeals for reform and change.

The *distribution of themes* for the speeches to be given in the *memorial* ceremonies for this celebrated sheikh and scholar provide us the general outlines of his career. The first speaker, writes *Al-Ahram*, "will provide a biography of his life and highlight his contributions to the Islamic Charity Society; the second will portray *the* salient features of his character, stressing his distinctive qualities while in the judiciary; *the third will focus on his position* within society and some of his activities and accomplishments as a member of the Legislative Council: and the fourth will discuss the legacy he bequeathed to Al-Azhar University, his contributions to the dissemination of proper Arabic, spoken and written, his service to Islam, and his quest to advance the cause of knowledge, Islamic theology and scholarship."

One notes, however, that the speakers largely focused on the later period of Mohamed Abduh's life following his return from exile. In its desire to round out the portrait of the man, *Al-Ahram provided its* readers a brief biography so as to fill them in on the earlier phases of his life. It writes:

"The dearly departed was born in Mahallat Nasar in the Governorate of Beheira. He joined Al-Azhar University where he studied under the Maliki theologian and dean of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed Eleish, who had described Mohamed Abduh as one of his most outstanding students. He *continued his studies in Al-Azhar until* Gamal Al-Din Al-Afghani arrived, through the auspices of Prime Minister Riyad Pasha, to teach logic and philosophy. Al-Azhar students rebelled at the new professor, accusing him of free-thinking and compelling Sheikh Eleish to have him expelled from *Hussein Mosque*.

"In 1879, Mohamed Abduh and his colleagues began to be influenced by the liter*ary revival*. Riyad Pasha attempted to reconcile them with Al-Afghani and appointed him a teacher in the School of Languages (Madrasat Al-Alsun). However, this revival did not please the Khedive Ismail who dismissed Riyad Pasha from the ministry, exiled Al-Afghani from Egypt and ordered *Mohamed Abduh to return to* his village in Al-Beheira. Mohamed Abduh remained in his village until Riyad Pasha returned to the ministry under the Khedive Tawfiq, at which point Riyad appointed Mohamed Abduh editor of the government's official gazette. This newspaper had a literary section which *flourished under his editorial*ship.

"In 1881, at the time the Orabi rebellion *erupted*, Mohamed Abduh was appointed director of publications and his standing advanced to such a degree that it was said that the Orabi supporters would not approve an order without first consulting him. Yet, Mohamed Abduh condemned a number of their actions. When the British entered Egypt in *1882*, he was one of the many arrested and in September of that year he was prosecuted on a number of charges, one of which was issuing a *fatwa* calling for the dismissal of the Khedive Tawfiq. Although the accused denied the charges, he was sentenced to a term of three years banishment. He chose *Syria as his* place of exile. After he served the term of his sentence, he traveled to Paris where he *joined Gamal* Al-Din Al-Afghani. Together they founded the newspaper *Al-Urwa Al-Wuthqa* (The Solid Bond) which was prohibited entry into Egypt. Mohamed Abduh also taught French there until he was pardoned by Khedive Tawfiq and returned to Egypt in 1887."

The following 18 years until his death is that period during which Mohamed Abduh's career followed the trajectory outlined by the four speakers at his memorial service: the Islamic Charity Society, the judiciary, the Legislative Council and finally as mufti of Egypt. The Islamic Charity Society was founded toward the end of the reign of Ismail. Originally based in Alexandria and directed by Abdallah Al-Nadim, *the society's primary* activities were focused on providing education to the poor. The popularity of the school built and operated by the society lasted until the end of the Orabi revolution when Nadim was forced into seclusion in the Egyptian countryside.

*The second phase of the society is chron*icled in the memoirs of court confidant Ahmed Shafiq who records that in September 1892 an assembly of dignitaries and senior officials met in the governorate building in Cairo in order to discuss the possibility of creating a committee to organise a charity evening at Ezbekiya Theatre, the proceeds of which would be destined for the Egyptian poor. Once assembled, however, the idea was mooted to make this committee permanent and devoted to charity work in general.

On 24 September the committee met again in order to review a draft charter for establishing The Islamic-Egyptian Charity Society as it was referred to, under the auspices of the khedive. The members of the committee included Sheikh Mohamed Abduh, Saad Zaghlul, Hassan Asem, Qasem Amin, Idris Ragheb, Mostafa El-Meligui and Ali Fakhri.

Two months later the society's charter was approved. From this point forward the Islamic Charity Society intimately connected with the name of Mohamed Abduh who was elected as its director.

The society's emphasis on education was clearly due to the inspiration and dedication of Mohamed Abduh to this cause. We note that in his writings on the history of education in Egypt since the age of Mohamed Ali, Mohamed Abduh was concerned with the shortcomings in the government school system which, he felt, was "not interested in the training of minds, the edification of the spirit and the formation of just men, but *rather the government's sole objective* behind the construction of schools is to provide students with a certificate that entitles them to a desk in a government department." Perhaps it is this sense of the inadequacy of the existing educational system that prompted the society to extend the period of study in its own *schools* from three years to four. Nevertheless, the society remained keen to link education to its desire to assist the poor.

Sheikh Mohamed Abduh began his career in the judiciary as a judge in the National Court in Banha. His rapid advancement in this career brought him first to Zaqaziq and then to Cairo where he was appointed as a justice in the Appellate Court. *His years in the judiciary left their imprint* both on the man himself and on the profession. Mohamed Abduh's earlier experiences proved useful to this track in his career. He was proficient in French, the language of the court system in Egypt at the time, as a result of his stay in Paris with Al-*Afghani. He was also able to draw on his* familiarity with the problems of the educational system in conjunction with his membership of the Legislative Council in order to promote his idea to establish a college for Islamic Jurisprudence. The new school, according to his conception of it, would not restrict its curriculum to the traditional Islamic sciences such as Islamic jurisprudence, court procedure and religious literature. *Rather, he felt that it was im*portant that students be taught relevant contemporary subjects such as mathematics, history and geography.

Mohamed Abduh's report struck a responsive cord with Lord Cromer and eventually, the government adopted the recommendations contained in Mohamed Abduh's report. On 2 May 1905 *Al-Ahram* viewed that the government decided to *form a commission in order to draft a pro*posal for the College of Islamic Jurisprudence. As this commission was formed only 10 days prior to Mohamed Abduh's death, he did not have the opportunity to see his vision become a reality. Moreover, the studies on the history of this college reveal that the death of its founding father put the project on hold for two years until Saad Zaghlul re-adopted the pro*gramme when he was appointed minister of* education in 1906.

Mohamed Abduh took advantage of his membership in the Legislative Council in order to push for the reforms to which he was dedicated. Although the Council's minutes offer abundant testimony to Sheikh *Mohamed Abduh's efforts, Al-Ahram's en*thusiasm on his behalf adds an important dimension of vitality. In its 3 March 1905 edition, the newspaper devotes the greater part of its second page to that session of the Legislative Council devoted to reviewing the report on educational reform submitted to the Council by Mohamed Abduh. The report recommends expanding the scope of primary education in Egypt through the *construction and renovation of kuttabs* (religious schools), teaching the Qur'an and religion in all phases of primary and secondary education and extending secondary school study from three years to four. The Ministry of Education viewed most of these recommendations favourably.

The most illustrious post in Mohamed Abduh's career was as mufti of Egypt. At the same time he was one of the most controversial individuals to occupy that office. His adversaries, whether political opponents or opponents to reform in Al-Azhar, found in many of his bold *fatwas* ample fodder to fuel their campaigns against him. Indeed, not the least formidable of his adversaries at times was the khedive himself whose relationship with Mohamed Abduh was frequently strained due to Mohamed Abduh's opposition to the khedive's attempts to secure greater control over the *Waqf* (religious endowments) foundations and due to Lord Cromer's support for the mufti's proposed reforms.

A notable *fatwa* was that which Mohamed Abduh pronounced in 1901 stip*ulating the need to obtain the opinion of the* mufti on death penalties handed down by the national courts. *Al-Ahram*, which sensed this landmark decision, commented that prior to Mohamed Abduh, Egyptian muftis "refrained from delivering their opinion on such questions on the grounds that the court procedures in the national courts do not conform with the customary procedures followed in the Islamic courts." *Mohamed Abduh*, however, was a *mufti* of a different mettle. As soon as he assumed the position, the newspaper remarks, "he elevated the office of the mufti to a supreme and dependable authority in legal matters. When cases are brought before him he subjects them to intense scrutiny until he familiarises *himself with the minutest details* of the case. Since he was a judge in the appellate court he is fully versed in legal procedure, the methods of the prosecution, and legal texts. He is, therefore, highly qualified to pronounce judgement on court rulings and if he considers them just, he will decree that they are so and if he has reservations he will convey these to the court."

If Mohamed Abduh's professional career was varied, the course he pursued toward the achievement of the reforms to which he was dedicated was consistent. Yet, based as it was on appeasing the occupation authorities, it provoked considerable controversy. Essentially, it was a course that earned its proponents the label of "moderates" in Egyptian politics and which was eventually embodied in the Umma Party founded by *disciples of the mufti* two years after his death. In the opinion of this party, reform offered the greatest guarantee for independence, as opposed to the style of "political agitation" as they described the other wing of the nationalist movement which was led by Mostafa Kamel.

In spite of the controversy Mohamed Abduh stirred during his life, Egyptians were unanimous in mourning the passing of this great man. The funeral ceremonies were attended by great numbers of people both in Alexandria, where he died, and in Cairo where he was buried. In Alexandria, *Al-Ahram* reports, "Ramla Station was a sea of humanity — hundreds and thousands of soldiers, police, marines, students, government officials, *ulema*, dignitaries and notables. The procession proceeded to the main railway station where a train waited to transport the coffin from Alexandria to Cairo." When the train arrived in Cairo, the coffin was carried in a large funeral procession. "A regiment of mounted police *marched ahead of the bier which was cov*ered in a cashmere shawl."

The funeral ceremonies befitted both the great stature of the man and his import to Egypt's contemporary history.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Bibi blacksheep

Call it what you will — Bibigate, corruption or partisan politics at its most basic and conniving level — but Netanyahu's latest *faux pas* is little more than another example of his *self-serving political motivations.*

The self-professed partner in peace will, of course, likely attempt cementing his shaky coalition by pandering even more to the interests of the extreme right in the Knesset. This comes as no surprise to any save for those who blindly embraced the misconception that Netanyahu was committed to a brand of peace that was just and comprehensive. The simple truth is that at no time since his election has the Israeli premier ever given evidence of anything other than his desire to conclude a hasty peace suited to Israel and Israel alone.

This aside, however, the hopes of establishing a national unity government seem further now than at any time in the past year. Netanyahu has taken precautions against this occurrence, buying off Finance Minister Meridor by dangling a political carrot in the form of the chairmanship of a new appointments committee. The extremist coalition party, Shas, is expected to receive similar incentives. Should the other partners in peace have expected any less? If self-serving egoism and immaturity had a four letter synonym, it would be Bibi.

Explaining the scandal, Netanyahu stated that it was a mistake which was blown out of proportion by a malicious press and a spiteful opposition. Going ahead with the settlements in Abu Ghneim, to name just one example, apparently does not qualify as a mistake. And, for that matter, neither does the belief that the security he so longs for will be realised without concluding a brand of peace equitable to all parties.

Rather than acknowledge the real mistakes, Netanyahu is bound to add insult to injury by leaning even more to the right — all for the sake of saving his hide. But in seeking to secure the future of the region, including that of Israel, would denials not be best replaced with responsibility and egos be set aside for the sake of security?

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office

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Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
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Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave. New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
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Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692966/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

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Italy
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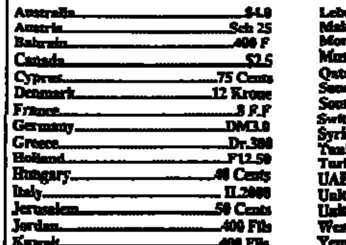
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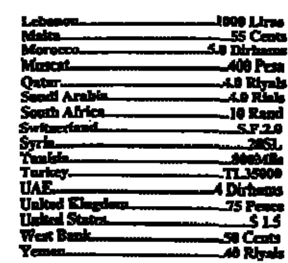
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The new media (1)

Homo informaticus

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed was invited this week to take part in a roundtable debate organised by the UN and Columbia University on the issue of the new media, problems and prospects at the eve of the XXIst century. The *Weekly* is publishing in two instalments an abridged version of his background paper to the panel discussion. The first instalment addresses the issue of media prospects

The second half of the 20th century has witnessed the onset of a new media age: the post-Gutemberg, post-timber-consuming age with prospects and promises far beyond our wildest dreams. One basic element in the mutation now underway is a new human-to-machine relationship, thanks to humankind's newly-acquired ability to build machines capable of performing the functions not only of human muscle, but also of assuming many of the functions hitherto assumed by the human brain. The invention of the micro-processor, the basic element in machines performing brain functions, has opened new vistas of human endeavour with qualitatively new characteristics. Knowledge of our environment, both the social and the natural environment, is no longer the product of what we perceive through our senses, or even in terms of what we call 'common sense', but is now *endowed with new dimensions derived* from mechanical, computerised, 'extensions' of the faculties of our brain.

Actually, a main factor in the technology of the new media is what we can describe as *liberation from size*. Humans are no longer slaves of their size on planet Earth and in the Universe at large. They now master technologies that allow them access to phenomena of scales that are increasingly small, or increasingly big, tending towards infinity in either direction. Gulliver's travels are no longer a fantasy or a Utopia. The recently released film called *Microcosmos* offers spectators such detailed images of the life of insects as to make their world appear to be of the same scale as ours. Thanks to micro-processors, humans can deal with orders of space and time that are fundamentally different from those to which their senses are accustomed. The ability to manufacture ever more miniaturised machines operating at tremendous speeds has made it possible to produce computerised images that, though appearing to have meaning and reality, are pure creations of the mind. This is called *virtual reality*. What we actually succeeded in doing is to move out of the world we know through our senses to produce, thanks to computers that operate at totally different levels of size and speed, and therefore, at totally different scales of space and time, images of 'worlds' that our senses might identify as real, while they are not.

On the other hand, interconnectivity, i.e. the weaving together of computer webs as graphically illustrated by Internet, is bringing about, beyond the Net's individual users, the emergence of some sort of 'super-being', the repository of some form of *collective intelligence*, as space and time tend to disappear as sources of disparity between concomitant activities and events. Collective intelligence is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for humans to embark on attempts at creating machine intelligence, i.e., *artificial intelligence*, and at widening the field of smart robots. Such accomplishments create unprecedented opportunities to enhance rational thinking, as well as to engage in new fantasies, develop new modes of artistic expression and open new vistas for the imagination. As standardisation and uniformisation of norms spread, diversification increases as well.

With the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of a third millennium, the Information Revolution seems to be auguring the transmutation of *homo economicus* into *homo informaticus*. The new media is not the core issue in this transmutation, but probably its most obvious manifestation. There is already talk of 'wearable computers', that is, computerised suits that would keep one warm in winter and cool in summer; that would change colour, form, texture at will, with one's watch or glasses eventually serving as computer screens. Every individual will be able to create his/her own interactive newspaper at any time of the day or night, and programme the amount and types of news he/she will want to absorb. 'Information superhighways' are the expression of a merger on digital basis of television, telephone and computer. A combination computer/telephone/TV/fax/modem fixed to an antenna directly connected to a satellite, all in the form of a reasonably small box clipped on to the belt, say, could offer its wearer the chance to retrieve any written text in the world, any picture, any film, any piece of music instantly, even if the person in question was wandering in the remotest desert. No longer will the home need to be furnished with newspapers and books, and paperwork will be a thing of the past. Information transmitted electronically will be accessible to everybody, retrievable by everybody, at any time and in any place.

But the really fundamental question is whether information can supplant economics as the most basic prerequisite for human life, survival and welfare. To what extent is an ever increasing plethora of information essential to *homo sapiens*, to their production of goods and reproduction as a species? Actually, it is possible to imagine people suffering from information overloading, in a state of 'information satiety' as it were. For the *ability* to know is one thing; the *will* and *urge* to know is another. All the more so in that the storage capacity of the human brain is not unlimited. Also, there are limits to absorption, assimilation, to a person's ability to remember. Moreover, how useful is the storing of information in the mind when computers can now perform this function more efficiently. Beyond a certain unavoidable minimum, it is no longer necessary to know, but rather to know *how* to know. Being informed is less an *aim* in itself than a *means*, a means to be better in control of one's fate. If such is the case, to what ex tent is the notion of *homo informaticus* relevant, whatever the accomplishments of the Information Revolution and its prospects in the future?

Actually, information is pertinent only within given boundaries. It can be divided into two categories: *live* information which is operative and a source of power (it derives its potency, as well as its market value, from *not* being accessible to people who need it, *at the specific moment* they need it); and *dead* -archive- information, which is accessible to everybody, and of no special interest to anybody, and, as such, of little or no value. What is of real interest is live information, not any information. And it is specifically that type of information that is linked to the media. Media information is always news in the making. It is always an addition to what was previously known, but without ever becoming completely known. It is of value only for a transient moment, only as long as it is needed by some given constituency. When nobody needs it any more, it becomes dead information.

But let us go back to the notion of 'collective intelligence' and the emergence of a web of integrated circuitry which will acquire its own personality transcending the in*dividuals who use it, and which is liable to* infringe on the individual's integrity and, more generally, on such basic human rights as the right to privacy, to discretion and to the holding of personal secrets, etc. Thanks to our current unprecedented ability to retrieve, classify and systematise information, much of what was previously part of the 'private' domain is now becoming open to the 'public' domain (for instance, pictures of celebrities taken without their knowledge or consent, that is, in situations that violate their privacy). Through the systematisation of information, models can be developed to serve as frames of reference in assessing the conduct of individual citizens and better scrutinising their modes of behaviour. By thus expanding what is attributable to the public domain, privacy is gradually eroded, which implicitly means curtailing human rights and freedoms, or at least establishing new parametres and criteria in defining them.

It is useful in this connection to draw an analogy with the world of theatre. The day to day life of every person can be divided into two distinct moments, one played out on stage, as it were, the other off stage. In the first moment, the person's behaviour is open to the scrutiny of others, that is, it falls outside the field of privacy. In the second, that is, off stage, a person is assumed to enjoy the immunities of privacy. Until recently, much of what remained off stage was due less to the fact that it was part of the individuals' private life (i.e., due to a subjective consideration), than to the inability to know due to the absence of an observer, of a person in a position to report the event (i.e., an objective consideration). Tragic death because of an accident or war is more likely to happen off stage than on, even though it classifies as news that is of public interest par excellence, simply because reporting in such situations is seldom available. Today, thanks to the technology of the Information Age, there are more opportunities, even deliberate attempts, to transform everything into information. With much of what is private being reported, given publicity and made public, this raises important ethical problems concerning human rights.

It also raises difficult queries. Because of the threat to their privacy, people can demand that certain types of information be withheld. A person suffering from AIDS goes to a hospital where he is subjected to a number of tests. He does not want people to know why he is undergoing those tests. Assuming that all the hospital's activities are recorded and kept in a computerised database, a complicated problem would be to devise a system by which the rules of privacy will be respected in each individual case. But however difficult it may be to solve, this problem is essential in that it touches on the very essence of the notion of *interactive information*. In the past, the communication of information was linear and uni-directional, transmitted from a sender to a receiver, be it one individual or many. It was not assumed that the receiving party could respond. The idea of interactive information is information exchanged between parties who are both senders and receivers at one and the same time, that is, information moving in a multi-directional, non-linear manner. That is why it is now possible to talk of the emergence of some form of web/super-body transcending the individual transmitters and receivers of information.

It should also be noted that access to an abundant resource is only of commercial value if that access is curtailed by the price mechanism. In other words, artificial scarcity has to be introduced and barriers erected to market entry for both consumers and producers. This is achieved through the techniques of making live information scarce at will, whatever the plethora of information as a whole. And this touches, as we have previously mentioned, the very *heart of what determines* value for a given piece of information. It reveals that information can be a commodity like any other in the market and highlights the fact that *homo informaticus* is not likely to be essentially different from *homo economicus*. What is new is that it places the former in a new context of developed interconnectivity, of some form of collective intelligence which offers humankind new horizons, but also raises difficult problems that have to be faced if the new opportunities are to materialise.

Fate and destiny

By Naguib Mahfouz

My short story entitled *My Fate, My Destiny* is about a woman who gave birth to a child with two heads attached to one torso. She calls one head "My Fate", the other "My Destiny". The story is an allegory of Palestine, the land claimed by both Palestinians and Israelis. History has shown that separating the two is almost impossible. After endless wars and strife, the two parties have learned to accept one another, coexist and share the same body.

In the story, "My Fate" takes the initiative towards peaceful coexistence, whereas "My Destiny" is more aggressive and less willing to coexist. The case is reminiscent of the situation in Palestine. The Israelis are much less determined than the Palestinians to live in peace and coexist on the same land.

The current Israeli government is trying to get all it can, and force the Palestinians to accept and submit to the status quo. But a peace built on submission is no lasting peace, only a brief cease-fire. History has taught us that things do not work in this manner. Humanity would have been saved the scourges of the second World War had the Treaty of Versailles not forced Germany into complete submission. Such treaties are, in fact, the fuel of revolutions and rebellions, whereas our goal is to establish peace and coexistence.

Although in my story, one of the twins dies, the other is told by doctors that he must carry his dead brother for the rest of *his life*. The two cannot be divided. Their coexistence is the only possible formula. They must cooperate and forget the past, as its woes are far outweighed by the innumerable benefits of the future if they manage to coexist in peace.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Fruits of blind support

Al-Ahali: "In all honesty, we must understand that an American solution will be one that serves US interests as the White House sees them — in accordance with the Zi*onist thinking prevalent in US think tanks, the Congress* and media and the highest levels of policy making in the Clinton administration... The West generally, and the US in particular, regard Israel as a Western bastion in a backward Arab Muslim region. Israel to them is a democracy. Its leaders are mostly of European extraction and it has the economic, social, scientific, and technological trappings of a modern state."
(*Ismail Sabri Abdallah*, 16 April)

Al-Gomhuria: "From the Qana massacre to the massacre of Jerusalem. The scenario hardly changes: An Israeli decision to set up a settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in Arab Jerusalem; an American veto to prevent the condemnation of Israel; an Arab, Islamic and world uproar; condemnations and resolutions from an Arab summit, from the ministerial council of the Jerusalem Committee, from the ministerial council of the Gulf Cooperation Council, from the ministerial council of the Arab League, from the ministerial council of the Non-Aligned Movement. Mediators, the same ones, fly into the region. Initiatives are formulated. And, guess what, Palestinian terrorism is once again used to blunt the international condemnation of Israel's actions."
(*Mohamed Abu Hadid*, 17 April)

Al-Ahram: "The US administration is reaping the fruits of its blind support to Israel. Netanyahu's stance on Clinton's proposals is a dangerous sign... The US administration's failure to force Israel to submit to its suggestions set a precedent, whereby Israel can go on saying 'no.' This could be ominous for the final stage of the peace negotiations, as Israel is likely to get more stubborn once these negotiations begin."
(*Editorial*, 18 April)

Al-Gomhuria: "Israel always sings the praises of freedom and democracy. If they mean what they say then the Netanyahu government is bound to fall. The two grave accusations levelled against the prime minister mean that he is no longer fit to shoulder the responsibilities of his office. Thus, this is the beginning of the end and it has come about sooner than most people expected."
(*Samir Ragab*, 18 April)

Al-Ahram: "Netanyahu's policies have come as a warning to the Arabs of what to expect concerning the peace process. The East Jerusalem settlement has spot*lighted the question of normalisation and its importance* as a negotiating card. The normalisation of ties with Israel must always remain conditional on Israel's respect for Arab rights and its commitment to the peace process. To normalise relations at a time when Netanyahu's policies are based on arrogance and force would only encourage him to continue his peace-wrecking policies. It would also undermine the position of those moderates in Israel who seek to inform the Israeli public of the consequences of Netanyahu's policies."
(*Abdel-Raouf El-Reedy*, 19 April)

Al-Akhbar: "Considering the present political crisis in Israel, should the Arabs continue to negotiate with Netanyahu who is about to fall from office? What harm can come to the Palestinians and Arabs if they boycott all talks revolving around the Palestinian question, the Jerusalem issue and the occupation of the Golan and south Lebanon? To negotiate with Netanyahu after this scandal is unthinkable. It would give him credibility and legitimacy that he does not deserve. If all the Arabs refuse to negotiate with him, the matter would come to a decisive and speedy end."
(*Mahmoud Abdel-Moneim Mourad*, 20 April)

Al-Ahram Al-Massa'i: "The present corruption scandal in Israel gives rise to fears that peace is not a basic option, neither for the Israeli leadership nor for the opposition. The peace process may become subject to cheap manoeuvres which could scuttle it. There is little hope for real peace when agreements signed by one Israeli government could be compromised later."
(*Editorial*, 20 April)

Al-Wafd: "It is the duty of oppressed nations to fight tyranny in the same way they fought colonialism. We have heard about rulers who shed the blood of their people and crushed their dignity and freedom; rulers who declared themselves demi-gods, silenced their opponents and tortured dissenters to death; rulers who killed innocent individuals simply to terrorise the rest of the population; and others who robbed their countries and let their people starve."
(*Gamal Badawi*, 20 April)

Compiled by ***Galal Nassar***



I chose to portray the face of Zaire's embattled president, Mobutu Sese Seku, in a way which would suggest the crisis he is currently facing. The armed opposition has gained control over vast swathes of territory, his allies have turned against him — even his trademark leopard-skin headgear seems to partake of his general air of defeat. His eyes are downcast and tired. I sought to convey the severe expression which often marks his aging face these days, tormented as he is by opposition and illness; but the forced smile which the African leader often shows the press is also visible.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

What Riviera?

Egyptian laws prohibit the construction of tourist facilities, housing or government buildings within 200 metres of the coastline. Changing the aspect of the beach is also prohibited.

The law for the preservation of the most important tourist attractions of the Red Sea — the marine environment, including the coral reefs — and for the protection of beaches against the ravages of construction works, was designed in the belief that beaches were public property, accessible to all. This law was deliberately and blatantly ignored by investors in Sinai. They competed to build garish high-rises, less than 50 metres away from the sea. Some actually had the gall to create artificial islands, drowning marine flora and fauna in a concrete soup. All received the complete approval — if not the blessings — of the local authorities.

Hurghada has suffered the most from such depredation. Currently, environmental legislators are attempting damage control on a major catastrophe: investors and former ministers of tourism tried to sell a small island, one of the 22 located off the Hurghada coastline, to an Arab investor, in spite of the fact that these islands represent a natural wealth resource of special strategic significance, since they are part of the Elba wildlife reservation situated on Egypt's southern borders, on the Red Sea.

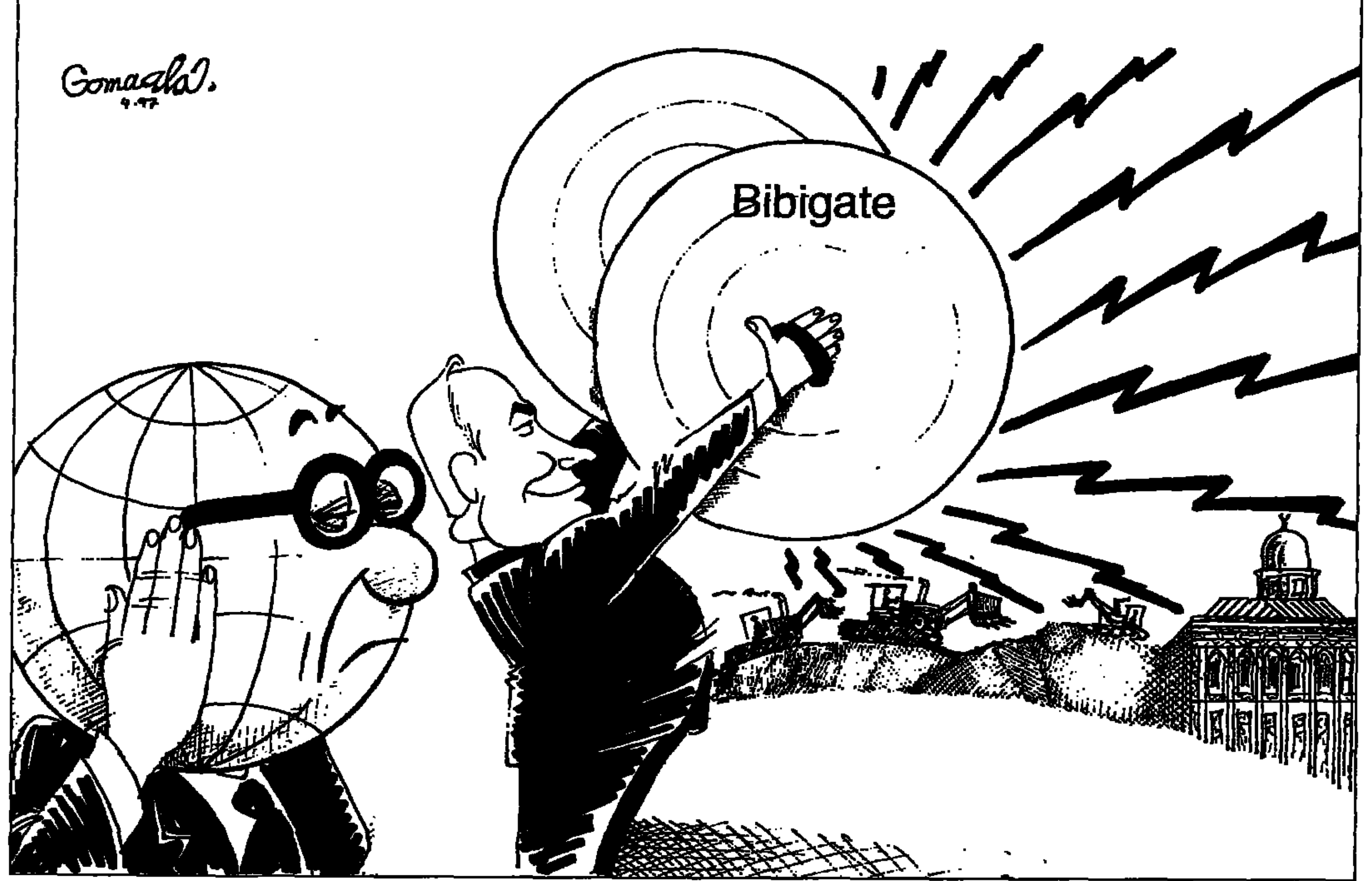
As for Sharm El-Sheikh, the tourist gem on the Gulf of Aqaba, the government lavished money and efforts on its development, in order to provide it with tourism investment opportunities. Sharm El-Sheikh's unique location near Ras Mohamed, and its immense popularity among divers, were responsible for this special attention. It was possible to curb the sporadic investment activities there before the situation became irremediable. Most tourist projects and establishments responded positively to the imposition of environmental protection standards. The difference between the two cases may be attributed to the fact that different investors were involved, or to the government's eagerness to rectify its own mistakes, although problems still persist that have not yet been addressed. The most urgent such problem is posed by the private mooring piers for yachts and smaller private boats. If nothing is done, Sharm El-Sheikh's renowned "golden beaches" will be polluted beyond belief, and the Ras Mohamed reservation will be drowned in the refuse from these pleasure craft.

Ever since the liberation of the Sinai from Israeli occupation, ever since the Egyptian flag was once again hoisted over Taba, giant tourist projects stretching along the 270 kilometres of beach between Taba and Sharm El-Sheikh were anticipated. This stretch of coastline has been dubbed the Egyptian Riviera, because of the unique beauty of its beaches and the softness of its sands. But where is the Riviera now?

With no research or planning whatsoever, mega-projects and tourist complexes proliferated, invading the beach in total disregard for legal restrictions. The Riviera beach is rapidly becoming a nightmare of proportions reminiscent of the Northern Coast debacle. Investors swooped down on every available centimetre of land. Environmental laws, aesthetics and ecology were trampled underfoot: the "cleverest" of the lot is the one capable of violating the most laws and pulling investment strings to construct the huge asphalt jungle that dominates the scene there.

A question is germane: what exactly is the role of the higher committee chaired by the prime minister for the coordination of tourist activities in Sinai? What is the role of the Tourism Development Authority in achieving the sustained development of tourism, preserving marine and desert wildlife resources, and preventing deterioration and pollution?

I was among those who witnessed the dignified ceremony, 15 years ago, when Egypt's flag was raised high over Taba, and celebrated the liberation of every inch of soil of Sinai. Recently, I revisited this historic site. I found it buried in garbage. I fail to understand why it has not been transformed into a garden or why, barring beautification, there is no memorial plaque to mark that momentous and historic event?



Soapbox

Ganzouri's dream

The document prepared by Prime Minister El-Ganzouri, *Egypt in the 21st Century*, envisages a bright future for Egypt. By 2017, Egypt's gross national income will quadruple to $324bn; its per capita share of GNP will rise, development will provide 550,000 new jobs a year to effectively reduce unemployment, taking into account newcomers to the labour market. Foreign trade is expected to increase by as much as four times, the balance of trade deficit will diminish, and the budget deficit will be in the vicinity of 1.5 per cent, ensuring that inflation would not exceed the five per cent mark. The standard of living is expected to improve in real terms by a rate of two per cent every year.

In this perspective, Egypt is set to grow into a true economic tiger. Egyptians must mobilise their potential and draw on their own capabilities, which are by no means inferior to those of other such tigers, like the Asian "miracles".

For the prime minister, realising this dream is contingent on domestic stability, peace in the region, boosting entrepreneurship among Egyptians, sound management of economic facilities and investment projects, drawing on the results of scientific research and the reform of the education system.

While these requirements are the conditions for progress, they can only be secured by the fulfillment of an even loftier goal, namely, social justice.



In the absence of social justice, we would not be able to consolidate our achievements. The benefit of scientific advances will be superficial, but unrelated to daily life. Without social justice, corruption will take root and flourish on fertile ground, bringing development to a grinding halt and obstructing economic growth.

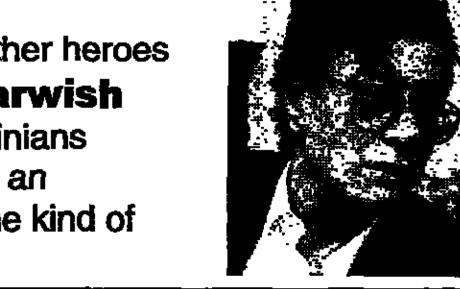
Social justice is the only incentive for realising collective dreams.

This week's Soapbox speaker is managing editor of Al-Musawwar *and a writer on economic issues.*

Abdel-Qader Shuhayeb

Elegy of a peace yet to be born

A new reality, containing neither heroes nor victims: **Mahmoud Darwish** finds the possibility of Palestinians *leading normal lives remains an* inconceivable luxury given the kind of peace offered by Israel



Even though the sun rises every morning announcing a new day we, who live on this land, who live on the margins of the new global Rome and on the boundaries of an eternal Sodom, must remember to distinguish between history and time. For us, what is new, what takes place under the sun, is the same old thing, though constantly it assumes new names and new tools, be these superstitions or weapons, thus driving us, more and more, towards a time without history.

Peace was supposed to take us to a new reality, a new life replete with new visions, a reality from within which we would draw a different picture for a much desired life, a picture drawn by two parties, with each party drawing both a picture of himself and one of that self in its relationship with the other. This picture was supposed to be drawn in such a way as to give the conflicting dreams of each party a chance to become less extravagant in the quest for a better joint life, a picture to replace the ugly present one which is marked by a quest for the total transformation of the other, making of the self of that other a constant subject of experimentation and destruction in accordance with the selfish motivations of an inflated ego.

The fallen body drenched in blood on this land is not that of a noble peace, for that peace was never born in the first place. Perhaps the womb of this process, governed by the master/slave relationship and by the laws of power, will never be able to give birth to that peace. It is the very notion of peace, as a value and as an interest, in the consciousness of those who chose peace as an answer to the questions of their national and cultural existence that is now being assassinated. Their choice of peace as an answer has not so far provided any solutions to those questions, and does not even allow a link between the various Palestinian concentration camps that look like the reservations of Red Indians or black townships, or a link to any future sovereignty or independence.

These are the features of our new-old domestic world. This is our present reality. And this is the land on which our language and visions exist, languages and visions that can neither read, write or see in isolation from the *relationship with a confiscated* and *besieged land, a confiscated* and besieged history.

Hence, the question of our national liberation is entwined with our cultural quest, which is manacled to everything that could deprive it of the ability to freely address questions regarding the fate of the world around us, the environment, or any of the questions of the 21st century as long we are tied to a golden age of colonialism in its most conventional form.

Herein lies the destructive effect of a continuing process of occupation, for in addition to the destruction of any cultural infrastructure, this occupation besieges our culture with questions pertaining to a primitive struggle for survival. Thus Palestinian literature remains hostage to a very modest cultural definition, remains a nationalist literature in the narrow sense of the phrase rather than venturing towards the wider horizons of self-questioning and debating the human condition. Should we then blame the victims for their reified cultural and creative conditions and for their stagnation, saying that this is their place and they deserve nothing better, leaving military and technological superiority to dominate all levels of meaning and structure. For the power legitimating the political project of the other also has its cultural dimension that seeks to strip the Palestinian of any cultural meaning.

And Palestinian culture, it seems, will not be able, in the era of an illusory Israeli peace, to disengage itself from the historicity of resistance culture. It may be able to make *minor modifications, linguistically, metaphorically* or aesthetically, in response to a journey that has taken too long, with too few provisions and too many detours that have changed the concept of heroism; *alterations or* modifications that come as a response to embarrassment at the waving of banners and the incessant beating of drums, or in response to a devastating bewilderment at the random turns history may take and its complacent obeisance to the sword, or perhaps in response to an infatuation with the ambiguity between the homeland and exile.

It would also seem that culture will find no other way but to develop its defence mechanisms, conventional or modern, and will hesitate before the temptation of liberating itself from its historical frame of reference, concentrating instead on battling with a counter ideological frame of reference and the shackles of a theological geography and the excesses of the obsession of negating the other, from which peace was supposed to free us.

The culture of resistance, in our southern margins of the world, and in an era of cultural globalisation that means, among other things, the hegemony of the culture and values of the centre and the exclusion of the possibility of the relevance of any other non-Western values and cultures to humanity, will always be linked to a quest to reconfigure identity.

However, we are still in that primordial stage of searching for a history and securing the necessary conditions for our national existence. Hence we are incapable of separating between a search for modernism and the *search for liberation, for how can we ponder questions* of post-modernism while we are tied to pre-modernist conditions, being unable to liberate ourselves?

We are what we are now: blood on the land, blood on *trees and blood on the mirrors of conscience, and this is* not only because the notion of security, which seeks to convert the other into its guard and servant does not lead to peace, but also because the very notion of peace has *not yet matured in the consciousness of those who do* not see in the natives of this land anything but a fleeting footprint, thus driving them to a cynical and unnecessary exchange of peace for land. Similarly, they *drive larger sections of their closed and oscillating society*, with the same cynicism, to an unnecessary exchange of peace for security.

By posing the problem in this way nobody, any longer, needs anybody else, because Caesar, the sole possessor of peace, land and security, can dictate his conditions — characterised by a classic racism — to a people who have been told that they have no right to complain any longer since they have received a divine promise that they can run the affairs of their own internal wretchedness, without the need for land or peace.

And before the blood of the innocents the Israeli Caesar said: this is not peace. But before the blood of the innocents from another race he did not say that this was not peace. His arrogant silence says: this is security.

Peace has one meaning for Caesar and that is obedience from the other party, who can be called a partner if need be, and that that "partner" praises the promotion of occupation to the status of 'Right'; a right that is not only sanctioned by holy books and songs of pioneers, but also carried out by bulldozers. For "A right that is not practiced *is not a right," we are told.*

Given such a definition the national rights of the Palestinians in their homeland become devoid of meaning, because they are rights that are not practiced. They are *not practiced simply* because the bulldozers of the "right" of the other have preceded to the location and proven that might is right.

As for any other terms of reference we know for right, they can be useful only in rhetoric. The "native's share", the Red Indian's or the black's, of right and peace can be measured only by his share of might. And with this flagrant and conventional lesson Caesar is calling us to wake from the stupor of his peace and to reconsider the old wine decanted in new jars, and to carefully distinguish between the peace process as a mechanism of subjugation wielded by one party, and between peace as a voluntary contract between two parties and two wills.

It is a simple lesson which bespeaks: Do not believe me, and search for your peace in your might because "a right that is not practiced is not a right." But like this we are returned, on both sides, to reading the framework of the struggle from within a perspective pre-dating the peace process, driving everybody to reformulate the question regarding the dividends of peace in terms of its dangers.

We are thus confronted with a historical dilemma that *offers the opportunity for us to question the sincerity of* Israeli society in choosing peace and to question the limits of an ethnic democracy that does not provide the other, requested all the time to consider its delicate inherent *constitution, with anything but racism.*

And we ask, perhaps ironically: Can we ever persuade the Israeli mentality to accept any peace except one that contradicts our interests, that negates us completely?

This *questioning also extends to encompass our failed* search for forces of peace inside Israel. To those intellectuals who saw in the Oslo Accords the second historic victory of Zionism, let us ask them two questions: Why do they not resist the dangers besieging that victory? And does the era of post-Zionism hold anything for the Palestinians other than a "final solution" to the Palestinian question?

Also in this context the heated question over dialogue with Israeli intellectuals as a condition, demanded by Israel, accompanying a political settlement, or paving the way for such a settlement, has to be re-posed, for that dialogue has turned into a cultural trial and a showcase for the superiority of Israeli intellectuals over Arab intellectuals, incapable of self-criticism for their previous opposition of the Zionist project. Such a trial, however, never paid attention to the necessity of distinguishing between the role of an intellectual from an occupied state and that of an intellectual from the society of the occupiers. It also never paid attention to the fact that it *has set self-criticism — i.e. apology —* as both an *a priori* condition for dialogue, and as its only goal.

But dialogues between intellectuals, as we understand them, must be liberated from the adjectives of representation, from the pretense of representatives, and from all shades of balances of power. A free dialogue, if and when it is motivated by an obsession to know the other, does not, necessarily, lead to consensus but may instead reveal the differences between each party and the limits *of the relationship between the self and the other.*

There is, too, another kind of dialogue, possibly the one most needed now, where intellectuals belonging to the occupying state show their solidarity with the *victims of occupation, inciting the consciousness of their* society to an understanding that it will never be free as long as it violates the freedoms of others.

Given such conditions I can find no moral objection to entering into a dialogue with an Israeli writer on an individual level. Such a dialogue may deepen my knowledge of myself and of my human dilemma, as it converges with that of the other, for both of us, in this case, will be entering a competition in praising exile.

We will need different conditions, however, and a clearer vision to transform that dialogue from this individual level into a public demand, for nobody, at the present stage, knows what they want from the other, knows the actual purpose of dialogue, and nobody yet knows the fine line that separates dialogue from monologue. Is the purpose of dialogue solely to prove that we are part of the mechanism of the process? Is it solely to improve our image in the media in this age of globalisation? And if it is only that, the question must remain within the realm of the personal, and we must not make of it a political issue or categorise it as either right or wrong.

With such a perspective I very well understand the reasons — be they psychological, cultural or otherwise — behind the absence of many Arab intellectuals from the meetings we hold here in the Occupied Territories. Each individual is free to choose his own way to express solidarity with the prisoner, his own way in resisting the jailer. However, Palestinian writers must announce vigorously that they do not want, have never wanted, will never want to be the bridge between the Israelis and non-Palestinian Arabs. We never invited anybody to meet anybody, and our main goal is to freely develop the relationship between our concrete reality and the wider Arab cultural context.

I also understand the motivation of other Arab intellectuals, and certainly all the non-Arab friends, who come to visit us to express their solidarity with the besieged Palestinians. Those who choose not to come do so for our sake and those who come also come for our sake.

However, any evaluation of the positive meaning of presence and absence has nothing to do with the question of normalisation, over which an Arab intellectual civil war is now raging, without the Israelis making the slightest attempt to interfere intellectually in it, as if the whole thing did not concern them.

The *term cultural normalisation itself* needs to be deeply scrutinised as it is very ambiguous. Nobody can ever force a culture to establish relationships with another non-dominant culture except inasmuch as there is a *need for the relationship.*

There is also a need to distinguish between knowledge, dialogue and normalisation. In the Palestinian case specific national conditions require a knowledge of the other and requires, too, *some sort of dialogue with that* other. However, the Palestinian-Israeli relationship is still one governed by struggle over the land more than struggle over consciousness. It has not yet been weaned away from its historical context for the simple reason that occupation continues and national independence has not been achieved. Thus, given such conditions, the search to establish normal relations between occupation and the Palestinian people is a search to immortalise occupation.

Hence, there can be no normalisation without an Israeli recognition of the national rights of the Palestinians, and hence the necessary linkage between the process of Arab-Israeli peace and the recognition of those rights. The question of normalisation, political normalisation, begins with the recognition of those rights, and ends there. Normalisation is the conclusion of the process, not its beginning. To place the cart before the horse implies freeing Israeli politics of any Arab pressure necessary to persuade Israel that peace should be for the benefit of all.

This is the way we perceive our reality and this is the land on which our language rests. And, this is the reality of the Israeli peace examined closely... nothing but air that flaps its wings like a bird of prey over the hills *surrounding us. And this spring promises us nothing* but falling beyond the brink of the abyss.

Our search for new visions here, on this land, finds no other frame of reference than the curses of the prophets *on Jerusalem. So who will save Jerusalem and who will* save peace? We have no other option but to follow in the footsteps of Gramsci, retaining both the optimism of the will and the pessimism of the intellect, and continue loving peace, the peace of justice and liberation, now crucified, for that peace is the son of freedom to come. We will take that peace with us to our ordinary life, and it will take us to its true name so that together we can dream of a new reality which contains neither heroes nor victims.

The text above forms an abridged version of the editorial of issue no. 51 of Al-Karmel cultural periodical, to appear the end of this month in Ramallah. It is translated from Arabic by Mona Anis, edited by Nigel Ryan, and printed here under a special agreement with the author who holds all copyrights.

Reflections

By Hani Shukrallah

Endings — of sorts

Netanyahu stayed solidly in the saddle this week, not only *surviving the Bar-On affair with not even a slap* on the wrist, but also, with the benefit of a few well-placed political bribes to dissident ministers, ensuring a new and stronger unity for his Likud-led right-wing *coalition. Arab breath, momentarily* bated in hopeful anticipation that the Israeli prosecutor-general would manage the seemingly impossible task of getting rid of Netanyahu himself, and not just his right-wing co*alition*, was released in a collective groan of familiar frustration.

But, short of domestic Israeli flukes of the Bar-On sort working out in their interest, what are the Palestinian and Arab leaderships, having pledged and re-pledged their commitment to the current, American-sponsored, peace process, counting on? New American ideas?

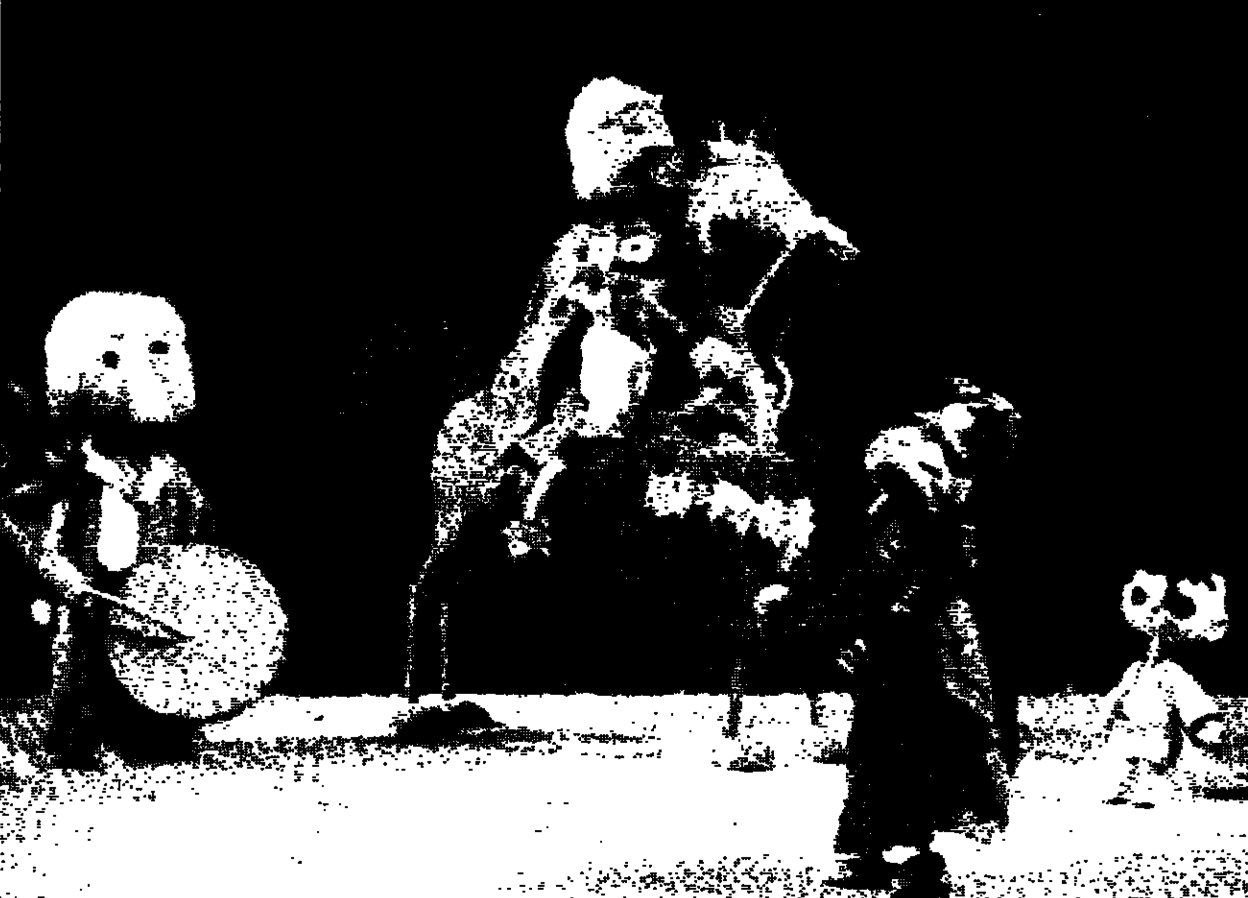
True, there is something exhaustingly familiar and repetitive about the endless ups and downs, twists and turns of the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict — the cold, cynical arrogance of the Israelis; their shameless sense of supremacy and deep contempt for the Arabs, even their most faithful "peace allies"; the ruthless exercise of Israeli military might; the smug and unwavering conviction in Israel's God- and US-given right to the land, resources and livelihood of others; the ease with which torture can be legally sanctioned, massacres dismissed as justified vengeance, and the "blood" of Jews extolled as a substance immeasurably more precious than that of Arabs. Of course, there is always the bottomless well of Arab illusions — Clinton II, no longer in need of the Jewish vote, will be more even-handed than Clinton I; Netanyahu, months after his campaign threats, will be *mellower than at the start of his term; a national unity* government between Likud and Labour will be better than the right-wing coalition between Likud and the religious parties. Need we recall the post-Gulf War song and dance about the US no longer needing Israel to protect its "vital [oil] interests" in the Middle East? Need we recall also the post-Soviet collapse hue and cry about the end of polarisation and a new world order based on "balance of interests"?

The list is endless, so long as it allows us to bank on something, anything, and thus saves us the task of devising a coherent strategy. Yet endings of sorts are at hand. A whole phase, stretching from June '67 to the present, appears to be finally drawing to a close. Even numbers are evening up: this year will mark 30 years since the June War, which, taken as a whole, could *well be called the "peace processing" years, with the* war itself, not Geneva, Camp David, Madrid or Oslo as the prime mover of a "peace process" whose fundamental logic is Palestinian/Arab adaptation to Israeli supremacy, under an American umbrella. From Golda Meir to Bibi Netanyahu, Lyndon Johnson to Bill Clinton, the Palestinians and Arabs continue to be taught lessons in "realism".

Hangin' in there; keeping, at whatever cost, one foot in any door that seems to be slightly ajar, and counting on the inexorable fighting spirit of the Palestinian people to continually reassert "the Palestinian number in the Arab-Israeli peace formula", as Arafat likes to call it, is no longer a viable strategy, if it was ever a strategy in the first place.



On Monday, Sayed Mekkawi, the well-known composer and singer, died. **Fayza Hassan** recalls one of his best loved creations, the operetta *El-Leila El-Kebira*



Puppets take *El-Leila El-Kebira* to the stage

A night to end all nights

El-Leila El-Kebira was first conceived as a popular operetta for the radio by Sayed Mekkawi, who composed the music, and Salah Jahin, who wrote the libretto.

It gives a vivid description of the last night of a *moulid* or festival, which lasts for several days, and is held in honour of a revered religious figure in celebration of the anniversary of his birth. The festival is essentially a street carnival accompanying the traditional visit to the saint's tomb. The visit, involving a Qur'an recital with the men stopping to chat, drink a cup of coffee and smoke a *shisha* afterwards, developed into full-blown festivities under the Fatimids. Though basically still a religious event, it took on the allure of a fair, with crowds of people dressed in their best clothes visiting the numerous booths where they could sample the side-shows, food and other specialities, sitting at small make-shift cafés to meet friends, sip coffee, *sahlab* (a popular sweet drink which includes milk, starch and nuts), mint tea and smoke a water pipe while the children, wearing colourful paper hats, took rides on swings, ferris wheels and donkeys, ate nuts, candies and other delicacies, and generally had a lot of fun.

Today *moulid* traditions are deeply ingrained. A popular source of entertainment and an opportunity for socialising, the *moulid* is eagerly anticipated by many families. Business deals are initiated or concluded during the *moulid*, considered a propitious time for commercial transactions. The festivals have their professional participants, who tour the country to attend every one of these annual celebrations. Moreover, it is the occasion for housewives to stock up on fare only sold at the *mawaled*, for young men to eye young women mincing through crowded alleys in the company of their parents, for prospective brides and grooms to be found and alliances concluded.

In *El-Leila El-Kebira* Salah Jahin and Sayed Mekkawi captured the atmosphere of good humour and general excitement of the *moulid*, the cries of the vendors advertising their wares, the voices of children following a beggar, chanting childishly indecent rhymes, and the ironic comments of young women aware that they are being observed. Written in *ammiya* (colloquial Arabic) and full of puns and word play, the spirit of celebration constantly transpires in the *zagharit* (ululation of joy) and the popular melodies. *Tar fil-hawa shashi, winta ma tedrashi, ya gada* ("My veil flew off in the wind and you didn't notice, you boor"), sings a teasing female voice, while some country cousins noisily greet friends from their native village, met by chance in the big city. Sometimes tragedy momentarily strikes: a small girl is lost and her mother looks for her, showing her ankle bracelet to passers-by, she anxiously asks if they have seen her daughter, who is wearing a similar one. But the child is found, while in a tent nearby, salt is spread seven times around a baby boy who has just been circumcised by the barber-surgeon. The young woman with the capricious veil is back; the young men are moving towards the arcades. Meanwhile, a vendor resorts to subversive advertising techniques to draw the clients in: "Chick peas, chick peas, they never end/They're dancing on the fire/ If you see chick peas and don't eat them/You're just like lovers who never consummate their passion."

The music and words transport the listener right into a popular quarter on a festive night. The screech of the *aragoz* which has all but disappeared from the streets, but can still be seen at *mawaled* is heard over the joyous clamour. The children gather in front of a faded stage made of wood and cheap material for a puppet show, howling with glee at the well-known antics of *aragoz*, who infallibly manages to beat both the odds and his enemies.

Written with sympathy and humour, the operetta creates no distance between the listener and the carnival. Even the Upper Egyptians, traditionally objects of derision for their Cairene compatriots, while recognisable by their accents, are not mocked but portrayed with uncompromising affection. Jahin captured the oral traditions of the urban and rural communities for whom sainted figures are very present in daily life, and who seize the opportunity of the *moulid* to celebrate the worldly aspects of faith. The *'imma* or turban, the symbol of religious learning par excellence, is also an indicator of virility. But it is Mekkawi's composition that puts you in the thick of things: close your eyes, and you can almost see the burly café owner, ordering loiterers to drink or move on; the women peeking out of their wraps even as they pull them more closely about themselves; the crowds, jostling for a glimpse of the show... It would be commonplace to suggest that Mekkawi's inability to see allowed him to capture the texture of the *moulid*'s sounds and songs, but how else can we understand his unique ability to combine chaos and chorus? Perhaps, for Mekkawi, the *moulid* was the synthesis of the city he could not see, but whose details he knew intimately — a soul he could only hear but would have recognised anywhere.

Nagi Shaker, professor of graphic design at the Faculty of Fine Arts, fell in love with *El-Leila El-Kebira* the first time he heard it. Several years after it was aired for the first time on the radio, in 1960, he suggested to Mekkawi and Jahin that it be launched as a puppet show. He designed 45 marionettes which the trio's friend, puppeteer and director Salah El-Saqqa, made by hand. It was a roaring success and soon television brought the show, which earned a prize at the Puppet Theatre Festival of Bucharest, into thousands of homes. It is still as popular as it was in the '60s, and there are few Egyptians who would admit they have never hummed, just under their breath: *Ya ghazal, ya ghazal, el-eshq halal, ya ghazal* ("Gazelle, love is not a sin") — or, for that matter, any of the other light-hearted airs which suddenly make them forget their troubles and feel that life is not so tough. After all, they know that there will always be another *moulid* just around the corner.

Music

Doctor Exactitude and Mr Hales

David Blake sees double and thinks twice is not enough

Piano recital; David Edgar; Cairo Opera House, Small Hall, 13 April

A strange bloom in the Cairo piano garden. The local listener has certainly had them for 1997 — the piano players. Young, old, up-market high-flyers, playing home-bred, playing imported — everything that can pound a keyboard made the noise, the gesture and then flew out again. Some were great, some smaller and some from places unknown.

Dr David Edgar comes from Georgia. They almost manufacture pianists there. The programme tells us he learned from Tengis Awizadjibi who was himself nurtured by a couple of other wizards — Gumnov and Oborin. So Dr Edgar has had schooling from the oracle itself.

No one can really tell a solo instrumentalist how to play before an audience. Once the show has begun, he is on his own — no maestro, no orchestra and no chamber players to make for group discipline. And the piano genuinely loves being solo, though Edgar is part of a piano trio at home in Tbilisi.

This concert was divided into two pieces. First, with courage and industry, Dr Edgar devoted himself to Egyptian piano music. Three composers — Attiya Sharara, father of the splendid violinist Hassan Sharara, Gamal Abdel-Rehim and Rageh Daoud — were represented. Egyptian composers of what is known as contemporary music are a rare race. They receive small assistance from limited sources but money from nowhere, there being no valid method of benefiting by contract or royalties from their performances. They have film and theatre incomes, if lucky. Of concert performance income there is none. A concert of this sort, half of which is devoted to Egyptian artists, is rare.

The Sharara piece, a rondo for solo piano, is typical of the composer's methods. Forceful, melodious, almost folkloric, it makes no effort to hide its origin and is therefore honest. Its tunes criss-cross in quick staccato chords, percussive and basic, like a young player making an effort to impress himself on the instrument. This suited Edgar. There are no bones about his methods either. He goes straight to the thing in hand. No atmospherics, no complications, it is a dotting of the "i"s and crossing of the "t"s with no nonsense between.

This method at the piano, as in most branches of the arts, has its uses. It can be powerful, direct and honest and without any special style. For the piano this is a method of strength that goes straight towards the mark and then misses it because if the music played is good music there is more to it than the notes, the dots and dashes. This method gets the player almost there. Music has its own mystery. There is the thing called musical context and this is the secret to be revealed by the performer and getting almost to it is not enough. So with most of Edgar's playing.

The second piece gave the answer to the questions raised in the first. Gamal Abdel-Rehim, a very courageous Egyptian musical mind, has much content to his work. Often brief and apparently almost cold, it nevertheless has its own style firmly founded on his Germanic background. Abdel-Rehim belongs to the twentieth century. Everything he writes seems to have something to say about the present. There is solution always to be found in such music. Mistaking this solution lands it and the player in a no-person situation. The piece chosen by Edgar, called "Variations", was split into two — first Protest, second Conflict. It was explicit. The form was fitted to the titles. The style was abrasive, treacherously moving through key-changes to polyphonic perpendicularism. Ragged and sharp-edged forms suit the player. But Abdel-Rehim never stays still. The restless sounds demand very sensitive performance. Edgar chose an embattled style, rugged enough, but then the music suddenly slips into a lyricism which he missed. The playing, though, still had power.

The Rageh Daoud "Sonata for Piano" brought the concert right into the present state of Egyptian musical composition. It was written over ten years ago and has had one previous performance — hardly a royalty bringer. This sonata is a large and spaciously-conceived work, organised to display the instrument and give a sonorous and rich impact to it. A little tricky, it needs forceful playing.

From a splendid opening melody it moves dramatically through three movements. Traditionally, the two quick sandwich the slow lyrical one into the centre. Some of the piano tones are inky and there seems to be a river-like pattern which runs through the entire composition, varying constantly. Daoud makes the piano express far out sounds like a dulcimer playing in the distance, with oriental sounds and then knotted bunches of notes flung in all directions, bringing it to a dramatic ending. It is inconclusive and troubling. Very original and, up to the very finish, Egyptian.

David Edgar's last half of the concert was an all-Chopin effort — and effort it seemed. After a relentlessly fortissimo ending to the Daoud sonata, we went straight into four Chopin Nocturnes, F major-op 15 No 1, C minor-op 48 No 1, F-major-op 15 No 2 and F-sharp minor-op 48 No 2. The interior decoration of Chopin — dances, opulence of rooms — was blown straight out of the window. We were given blocks of sound and rock-like climaxes. Where were the nocturnes? No meditative evenings with this player. Then came the ballad of op 38 No 2 in F-major. Suddenly — a mark: he hit it. Edgar had the notes, the dots and the dashes, behind. We had a piece of piano music, not a railway timetable.

The Mazurka and a Bolero finished a concert compelling, troubling but finally achieving. David Edgar makes inordinate demands upon himself. It would be better if he could make the emotional rewards greater.

Brahms Death Centenary; Violin and piano recital: Sami Ibrahim, violin; David Hales, piano; Cairo Opera House, Small Hall, 17 April

A jolly concert for the Brahms centenary. He would have loved it because it was happy, relaxed and warm. It began with the Sonata op 78 in G-major for Violin and Piano. This work opens straight into strong, confident piano playing which suited David Hales. He was pleased, relaxed and full of tone — very Brahmsian. So much so that in the beginning and throughout the concert the violinist, Sami Ibrahim, was hard-pressed to keep up with him. Hales went straight for the message of the music. No near misses for him. This put a strain on the violinist who seemed to need a more relaxed tempo and speed throughout.

From the opening of this sonata the emotional involvement was keen and enjoyable and we had that rare thing in the concert round — fresh, almost improvised playing. This concert gave startling evidence of the dichotomy which hangs over the life of Brahms.

The first sonata calls for playing that shows the active, innovative side of him: the young, unshackled Hamburg nature of the composer. Hales went for this and captured it in the two *allegro* sections of the sonata.

The composer suddenly moves into other areas, other rooms and eras which completely removes Brahms from the conservatoire's idea of Holy Joe. The violin of Sami Ibrahim sounded out of its depth at the multiple changes needed. Ibrahim never faced up to this sonata, he never seemed to attempt the deeps or the heights and his tone showed the strain. The piano alone rose and fell with the moods called for. But it was a live performance full of struggle, nothing dry or formal, thanks to the piano.

A short piece, a Scherzo, followed, a lost piece floating through troubled waters, seeming to oscillate between salon and water-front. Then came the other side of Brahms, the Sonata 108 in D-minor. Here is the complete picture of Brahms the person — the future, the present and, most troubling of all, the past (this own, ours, whose?). It is really an elegy in D-minor, not a sonata. Questions, questions: did he ever love anyone? Such questions do rise through the troubled waters of this music. He was a sea person and he took his secrets to the ocean deeps.

The sonata is more like a vast tapestry, old and torn, blowing in the wind, sweeping through a collapsing palazzo. There are signs, tremors, stresses, passions and terrors — all given lavishly to the two instruments, as if they could ever understand the conundrums of this work. Hales and Ibrahim did their best. The violinist finally found a rich tone he had lacked throughout. Together they played with intensity. At the finish, when the music turns into sentiments too obvious to bear, Brahms puts on the speed and, in a burst of agitato, it halts to an end. Nothing more to say. Thankfully the death celebration glorifies Brahms and life.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

The Water of The Desert (Photographs)
Al-Ahram Gallery, Al-Ahram Bldg, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786300. Daily 9am-10pm. Until 27 April.

Vissela Farid (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3241. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 27 April.

A Leap Into The Past: The Bracciano Lake 8000 Years Ago
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Sat & Sun, 9am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 28 April.
Documents of underwater archaeological research in Italy.

Xavier Puigmarti (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 30 April.

Jean Crotti (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 3 May.
New works under the title Pas Sages Comme Les Images.

Domestic Architecture in Islamic Egypt
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. Sun-Wed 8.30am-7pm, Thur 8.30am-5pm & Sat 12pm-5pm. Until 5 May.

Hussein Shariffe (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 2pm-9pm. Until 8 May.
New works under the title Innerspace.

Ann Parker
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 May.
These 34 colour photographs record the palette of mostly self-taught artists exemplifying the folk art of the Great Pilgrimage. Including are representations of the *Kaaba*, images of transportation, calligraphic inscriptions and pastoral renderings of Islamic worship.

Group Exhibition
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-10pm. 27 April-9 May.
Occupying the Rateb Seddiq, Nagui and Youth halls are the works of five artists, including Sami Keshk and Mohamed El-Tahawi.

Publications of the Greek Community in Egypt From 1853-1983
Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 18 Sidi El-Metwalli St, El-Attarin, Alexandria. Tel (03) 482 1598. Until 10 May.

Moustafa Ahmed (Paintings) & Fatma Refaat (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 10 May.

Nazih Rashid (Wood Carvings)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Borg El-Ateba', Bab El-Louk. Tel 355 8367. Daily 12pm-9pm. 27 April-15 May.

Maquettes
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 5 June.
Research works by the students of the Architecture School of Nancy, currently in Cairo, on Bab Nasr.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts and icons.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Naseeb
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. 24 April, 4.30pm.
Starring Amitab Bachchan.

Congratulatory Speech
Japanese Information and Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 24 April, 6pm.
Directed by Tomio Kuriyam (1986).

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
26 April, 7pm: Senso, directed by L Visconti (1954).
27 April, 7pm: The Days of Democracy, documentary film directed by Atteyat El-Abnoudi.

German Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
24 April, 7pm: Angst Essen Seele Auf, directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1973).
30 April, 7pm: Alice In Den Städten, directed by Wim Wenders (1974).

French Films
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
30 April, 7pm: Les Cousins, directed by Claude Chabrol (1959). Starring Gérard Balin and Jean-Claude Brialy.
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
29 April, 7pm: Pour La Peau D'Un Flic, directed by Alain Delon (1981). Starring Anne Parillaud and Jean-Pierre Darras.

Vissela Farid

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Samaka Wa Arba' Qoroush (A Fish and Four Sharks)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Emra'a Wa Khamas Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma (A Woman at the Top)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Star Wars
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Phantom
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

The First Wives Club
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Jerry Maguire
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Satan's Treasure
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Craft
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Escape From L.A.
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Glimmer Man
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Earth Girls Are Easy
Karim I, as above. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Surf Ninja
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Courage Under Fire
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur & Sat midnight show.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 24 April, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 24 April, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Amadeus Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 25 April, 8pm.
Conducted by Mostafa Nagui.

Jazz Concert
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 26 April, 8pm.
Performed by the Yehia Ghannam Band.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 26 April, 8pm.
The orchestra, along with soloists Gina Lichtenberg (soprano) and Michael Gzerny (tenor), conducted by Adolf Winkler, perform the Spring Concert.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 27 April, 8pm.
With Hani Shaker.

Flute Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 27 April, 8pm.
Inas Abdel-Daim performs.

Piano Recital
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 28 April, 8pm.
Swiss pianist Werner Bärtschi performs selections from Bach, Schubert, Mozart, Vogel, Liszt as well as a composition of his own.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 29 April, 8pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company.

DANCE

Weyzeck
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 26 April-5 May, 8pm.
A dance theatre performance by Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thöny, based on the play by Georg Büchner, with music by René Aubry; the dancers and actors are Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, Reem Hegab, Mohamed Shafik and Essam Said.

THEATRE

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Balouza Fil Ballon (Balouza at the Balloon)
Balloon Theatre, Corniche El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily 9pm.

Messa' El-Kheir Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 9pm.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell, Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9pm.

El-Mar'a Allati Tokallem Nafsoha Kathiran (The Woman Who Speaks To Herself Too Much)
Zaki Tolaimat Hall, El-Tali'a Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 937 948. Daily 9pm.

El-Mahzala (The Disgrace)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

LECTURES

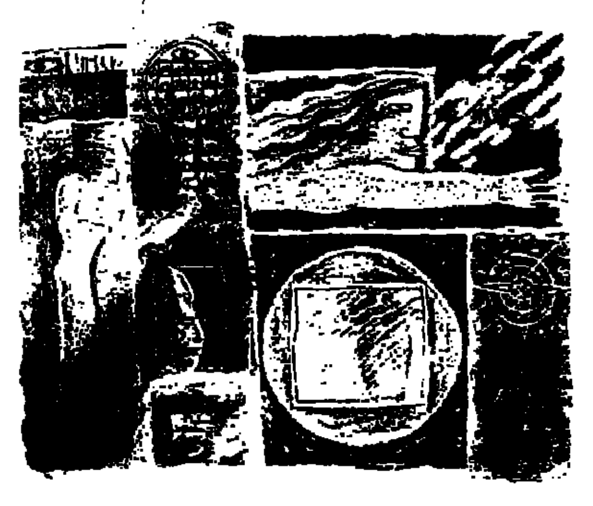
Melodramas of Nationhood: Egyptian Television Soap Operas
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 24 April, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Dr Lila Abu Lughod, New York University.

Contemporary Transformations of The Egyptian Middle Class: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyet El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. 29 April, 5pm.
Lecture in Arabic by Dr Abdel-Baset Abdel-Moe'ti, Ain Shams University.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Mahmoud Hamed

WORKING class women figure prominently in paintings by **Vissela Farid** on show at **Salama Gallery**. Though impressionist in style, the paintings are not merely pretty, but employ a daring brushstroke. Sharing gallery space with Farid are Cezannesque landscapes by her husband, the late **Maurice Farid**.

The Centre for Arts, Zamalek, plays host to over 30 ceramic sculptures by **Ayman Abdel-Meneim**. Richly textured, experimental in their approach to material, Abdel-Meneim's abstract sculptures are also technically accomplished.

Also at the Centre for Arts are engravings by **Mahmoud Hamed**. These are inspired by folkloric magical symbols and pharaonic mythology.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

April. Ginsberg died. Joy Harjo performed poems in Cairo and Mark Strand's voice was on the phone. **Nur Elmessiri** and **Tom Lamont** were there

Elsewhere, he wrote

"Men are *running across a field/* pens fall from their pockets./ People out walking will pick them up./ It is one of the ways letters are written" (Mark Strand, "Letter," *Darker*). If a hand does not pick up the pen, if indeed no one is out walking, what we're left with is a "dead letter" — a letter never received, one that cannot be returned to sender. Dead letters are messages in bottles caught in the doldrums of the in-between.

The dead letter phenomenon menaced the telepress conference discussing "*Contemporary American Voices in Poetry*" with Mark Strand on Wednesday 2 April and which was held at the American Center for Press and Cultural Affairs. For half an hour, the Cairo audience could only dimly hear Strand's voice in Chicago. And when finally we could hear each others' voices, the telephone line was asynchronic: *if he had* the line, we didn't; if we said "yes!" in response to his admission that he does not use e-mail, he couldn't hear us — and if he asked "Can you hear me?" we couldn't simply say "yes" and be heard. To make your simplest interlocutorial accompanying interjection heard, you would have had to take the speaker's line, his leave to speak. The wide open spaces in-between became tangible as time. Frustrating though that may seem in terms of ordinary conversation, the dead-letter menace enabled an extraordinary, almost spooky encounter with a voice to take place. When Strand spoke, *you could only listen to his voice*. And his is an extraordinary voice: quiet, deliberate, hypnotic, haunting.


The Somerset House Conference, painted by an unknown artist (1604), the National Portrait Gallery, London

He made some opening remarks about the poets who influenced him (not Whitman, but Dickinson, among others), the European poets he read in translation ("they seem to live in a larger moral universe than most American poets largely because they were vulnerable to history in a way that we are not — we seem to be more limited by biography"), his return to painting ("because (he) thought finally (he) was ready to do what (he) wasn't ready to do when (he) was a lot younger"), his life as "a spacey intellectual" *in academia (John Hopkins in the fall, Chicago* in the spring): "There it is, you have my life. I have a father and a mother I might add. I have a wife and two children. I not only read books and write but I make dinner every night and I consider myself a decent cook. So there you have it. Is that enough? Would you like to ask me some questions?"

"Why do you never come?" he wrote elsewhere, in "*My Life by Somebody Else*": "*Must I have you* by being/ Somebody else? Must I write *My Life* by somebody else?/ *My Death* by somebody else? Are you listening?/ Somebody else has arrived. Somebody else is writing."

The moderator, Dr Laila Rizq (Ain Shams and Misr International University) thanked Strand for his opening remarks which had "set the stage very well" and asked him if he would read us a couple of his poems. He was, he told us, going to read some poems from a new manuscript. The line began to fade. "Can you hear me? Can you hear me at all? I don't know whether you can hear me, but I'll read a poem that I thought of initially as I was sitting on a stage at a translation conference and I thought '*Wouldn't it be interesting if a dead poet came* back to give a reading? I wonder what the response would be?' and I thought 'Wouldn't it be great if Wallace Stevens came back from the dead to give a reading?' And that generated a train of thought which resulted in the poem I am going to read. This poem is called 'The Great Poet ...'"

He was cut off. We lost the line.

"He knew he was not needed./" the poet Mark Strand *wrote elsewhere, in "To Begin"*: "*that his speech was a* mirror, at best./ that once he had imagined his words/ floating upwards, luminous and threatening./ moving among the stars, becoming the stars./ becoming in the end the equal of all the dead/ and the living. He had imagined this/ and did not care to again./ If only he could say something./ something that had the precision/ of his staying in bed./ It took no courage, no special recklessness to discredit silence."

It did take a measure of recklessness to continue once the line returned. To apply to the potentially dead-letter situation the terms Strand used in his reply to Dr Mona Ibrahim's (Cairo University) question about translation, *it took courage to continue with the "act of cultural generosity"* that the telepressic encounter entailed. Continuing, once the line returned involved making a Pascalian wager, betting that "personal idiom" will indeed travel across the count-to-five silent gap of an asynchronic telephone line to reach another "personal idiom"; it involved taking the risk of assuming that your voice is being received and "translated" into meaning "by someone *who has an individual stake in the making and remaking* of language." Courage all the more so if your "own problems with language as a child were the result of... shyness", if as a child you took the vow never again to speak in French, your mother tongue, in order to "fit in", if your having been made to move as a five-year old suddenly from one language/place to another language/place "created a deep uncertainty about (your) identity vis-à-vis language which (you) think to a certain extent stayed with (you) even though (you) clearly have" a well-established and very famous "identity as a user of American-English"— as one time American poet-laureate.

A disembodied voice, a voice one step behind itself, came from speakers that faced an audience. The Cairo panelists sat side by side at a table and faced an audience. One of them used the microphone as a telephone receiver: when she listened she put her ear to it.

"When you see them/" Strand writes in "Breath", "tell them I am still here (....)/ that as the sun rises and sets I know my place./ that breath is what saves me./ that even the forced syllables of decline are breath./ that if the body is a coffin it is also a closet of breath./ that breath is a *mirror clouded by words./ that breath is all that survives* (...)/ as it enters the stranger's ear/ and stays long after the word is gone."

We were in Cairo, in Sherman Hall, in a room. And elsewhere, in "The Room", Strand wrote: "The trees outside/ remind me of something/ you are not yet aware of./ You have just entered./ There is something like sorrow/ in the room. (...)/ I am here. Can you see me?/ I shall lay *my words on the table/ as if they were gloves, as if nothing* had happened./ I hear the wind/ and I wonder what are/ the blessings/ born of enclosure (...)"

Mark Strand has been blessed with two children, a daughter who is now a writer and a son who is "extremely verbal." *He* remembers with a sense of awe how his then eight year-old daughter came up with an "extraordinary invention" one summer when, with Octavio Paz and his family, they played a word game involving questions without answers put in one hat and answers without questions put in another. Her answer *to a question she did not know* was: " I was the fat girl who sat under the palm tree in silence."

Strand loves and adores the "daring" with which his 13 year old son experiments with vocabulary. When one of the panelists suggested to Strand that his "own inhibitions as a child" can hardly be described as "a waste" (which is how, at one moment on the line, he had described them), he conceded: "My *own silence* as a child — *it's not* a waste. I mean, I'm constantly finding ways of erasing myself. I don't know why but, anyway, there it is. I think those silences as a child were absolutely necessary in the making of my poetry."

"He leaned forward over the paper/ and for a long time saw nothing./": "The Untelling" by Mark Strand begins. "Then, slowly, the lake opened/ like a white eye/ and he was a child/ playing with his cousins./ And there was a lawn/ and a row of trees/ that went to the water." And as "The Untelling" begins to end: "He closed his eyes./ He thought of the lake (...)/ he felt himself at that moment to be/ more than his need to survive./ more than his losses / because he was less than anything./ He swayed back and forth./ The silence was in him/ and it rose like joy./ like the beginning."

Before reading to us three of his poems, before the line was cut once and for all, Strand reminded us that his *poems "are intentionally funny but also very dark"; they* "combine the elaborate and the simple, the dark and the light."

Strand "love(s) to engage in fantastic discourse with children because it's almost impossible to do so with adults. Adults lost the gift, or lost the interest, of speaking, oh, out of context. But," he adds half in jest, half in dead earnest, "I would be crazy if I spent all my time *speaking with children. I mean I do talk to grown-ups* too. I don't know whether I've answered your question ... I'm not sure I'm being heard there. If you can only hear half of each of my sentences, then this must be a very bizarre conversation."

Mark Strand, "The Great Poet Returns": "Tell me, you people out there, what's poetry anyway?/" — poetry is what you have given us — "Can anyone die without *even a little?*" Well, *for those who have what Joy Harjo* calls an "absolute need to sing" and thus conversely to listen, no, they cannot die or really live without even a little.

Delighted to have read/written this bizarre letter, to have been able to engage in fantastic discourse, to have heard such "luminous and threatening" words, words which I hope will continue to haunt. Yours sincerely ...

N E

Plain Talk

I have been following an interesting experiment that started in London on 8 April and will continue until 27 April. Four leading theatre critics have turned directors, while four directors have acted as critics, reviewing the productions. This experiment has been met with both *support* and *opposition*. Michael Conveney of *The Observer* is a harsh critic of the experiment, as seen from his article "Why be a theatre director when you can play God from the stalls?"

The four critics are Michael Billington of *The Guardian*, Jeremy Kingston of *The Times*, Nicholas de Jongh of *The Evening Standard* and James Christopher, a freelancer. Each one of these will direct a play, with Billington responsible for a double bill of Strindberg's *The Stranger* and Pinter's *The Lover*.

When I was in London some *months ago I had a long meeting* with Billington when the idea was still in embryo. Billington is a great admirer of the late Kenneth Tynan, who made the famous admission: "A critic is a man who knows the way but can't drive a car".

The event was so important that Radio 4 had it as the third item on its news bulletin. The media regarded the experiment as giving the critics a taste of their own medicine.

Michael Conveney wrote harshly about the event, declaring that he had no intention of reviewing the plays since he was not in the habit of reviewing amateur theatre. Coveney's position appears to be that a full time theatre critic should not engage in anything so meddlesome as directing.

The director Charles Marowitz insists that "the director is the critic of the production, just as the critic, offering alternative approaches, often redirects the director."

It is important for critics and artists to view themselves as part of the same community, striving towards common goals. When this is the case then the possibility emerges for a genuine exchange of ideas *rather than the feeling of* defensiveness that often characterizes their relationship.

I remember discussing this so-called crossing of the barrier with Michael Billington. He thought such an experiment was bound "to make us more aware of the technicalities of theatre". He added the coda: "We may become more rigorous critics. I don't think it will make us kinder. I think *it will make us more* analytical." Looking at what both critics and directors have said of this novel experiment I am of the opinion that on the whole it was a good thing.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Amazing evidence of praise

"In a misty dawn at the centre of the *world is the morning* star, tending cattle at the other side of this fence. Several years away you can see smoke from a hogan where an old man is cooking breakfast. He has already been outside to pray, recognized the morning star and his relationship to it, as he stands at the centre of miracles" (*Secrets from the Center of the World* [S]14).

Joy Harjo, Native American poet, member of the Muscogee (Creek) tribe, is one who can "hear the sizzle of newborn stars" (S 56), who knows what it is like to be "nearly broken with the secret antelope of compassion" ("Healing Animal") and has faith that "Anything that matters is here. Anything that will continue to matter in the next several thousand years will continue to be here" (S 32). "It is an honour", she writes, "to walk where all around me stands an earth house made of scarlet, of jet, of ochre, of white shell. It is more than beautiful at the centre of the world" (S 60).

It is an honour to have been at Howard Theatre, AUC, on Wednesday 9 April from 11 to 12, to have heard Joy Harjo recite/story-tell/sing, to have been witness through her presence *and* words to the possibility that "Our souls imitate lights in the Milky Way" and to have seen how "it's the how that baffles. A saxophone", like Harjo's, "can complicate things" ("The Place the Musician Became a Bear"). For this we should give praise and thanks. "The *imagining* needs praise as does any living thing." Those of us who were graced for an hour by standing at the edge of the miraculous *and* recognizing our relationship to it were amazed. We heard "Stories, songs", Joy's, which "are evidence of this praise./ The imagination", we recognised, "*illumines us, speaks* with us, sings with us" and — on a universalist "political" note — we saw how "Stories and songs are like humans who when they laugh are indestructible" ("A Postcolonial Tale").

Joy Harjo writes poetry, she says in *Contemporary Authors*, because "it helps in travelling between *many* worlds and helps in speaking them."

She senses, as she enabled us in the audience to sense, how "Words are not just words but sounds, which are voices, which are connected, *growing* to others." On the jacket of the 1996 CD *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century* by Poetic Justice (a jazz-reggae-blues band of which Harjo is a member and for which she writes the lyrics) Harjo writes: "The term *poetic justice is a term of grace*, expressing how justice can appear in the world despite forces of confusion and destruction ... We are forged by this dance for justice and the absolute need to sing."



Joy Harjo and Ginsberg performing

Her poems and songs remember what — if it were not for the blessed power of memory with which she is more than well endowed — would be dismembered, mutilated beyond recognition by *the sometimes seemingly* invincible forces of destruction. Past, present and future figure in the delicate constellations traced by her poems. In "The Creation Story" she writes: "I'm not afraid of love/ or its consequences of light (...)/ I am ashamed/ I never had the words/ to carry a friend from her death/ to the stars/ correctly" — correctness, decorum elegantly anchoring that fierce *love her poems have for* horses, stars, humans — "Or the words to keep/ my people safe/ from drought/ or gunshot./ The stars who were created by words/ are circling over this house/ formed of calcium, of blood (...)/ If these words can do anything/ I say bless this house/ with stars./ Transfix us with love."

The wonder of Joy Harjo, of her poems, is that there isn't the slightest *hint of the bitter* or the shrill. The spirit of her ancestors are everywhere near us when she sings/recites, ancestors who were *subjected* to one of the most brutal genocidal moments of *this* our human history; yet she writes in "Grace": "I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people." *There is nothing* of the mere victim in her poetry. Beholding such a house "of calcium, of blood" as Harjo, one is amazed. In "Reconciliation: A Prayer" she prays to the "sun, moon, stars, and other relatives peering at us from the inside of god's house" to "keep us from giving up in this land of nightmares", and gracefully she adds: "which is also the land of miracles." And, in "The Real Revolution is Love" she sings, one assumes, of America: "This is not a for*eign country, but the land of our* dreams./ I listen to the gunfire we cannot hear, and begin this journey with the light of knowing the root of our own furious love."

In "Letter from the End of the 20th Century", Harjo tells the story of a Chicago taxi driver — an Igbo immigrant — shot by a casual murderer, a Jamaican. His ghost returns and finds the murderer "shivering in a *cramped* jail cell. *He could* hang him or knife him — and it would be called suicide. It would be the easiest thing." *Moved by his own mother's grief* and by "the prayers of the young man's mother", "he gives the young man (his murderer) his favourite name and calls him his brother." "There is", Joy's song tells us, "a choice even after death."

While affirming that "Memory was always more than paper and cannot be broken by violent history or stolen by thieves of childhood", in "The Myth of Blackbirds", a love song, Joy Harjo's "I" is thankful not only "To the ancestors who do not forget us in the concrete and paper illusion. To the blackbirds who are exactly blackbirds", *but also "to the brutal city"* — Washington DC— "for the space which outlines (the beloved's) limber beauty."

Even when she sings a song in remembrance of a Native American who was murdered for her political activities, there are no petty agendas, no merely ethnocentric or exclusivist values — but a justice and suffering which encompasses all who care to bear witness. And if there is anger, it is suffused with the delicate-unbreakable strands of a furious *love, is marked* through *and* through with the footprints of "the secret antelope of compassion":

"I am amazed *as I watch the violet* / heads of crocuses erupt from the stiff earth/ after dying for a season./ as I have watched my own dark head/ appear each morning after entering/ the next world/ to come back to this one/ amazed ... / Anna Mae./ everything and nothing changes./ You are the shimmering young woman/ who found her voice./ when you were warned to be silent, or have your body cut away/ from you like an elegant weed./ You are the one whose spirit is present in the dappled stars./ (They prance and lope like coloured horses who stay with us/ through the streets of these steely cities. And I have seen them/ nuzzling the frozen bodies of tattered drunks/ on the corners.) .../ we understood wordlessly/ the ripe meaning of your murder./ As I understand ten years later after the slow changing of the seasons/ that we have just begun to touch/ the dazzling whirlwind of our anger./ we have just begun to perceive the amazed world the ghost dancers entered/ crazily, beautifully":

"For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash Whose *Spirit is Present Here and in the Dappled* Stars (For we remember the story and must tell it again so we may all live)."

N E

Songs from the edge

During the past few weeks in Cairo, we have heard daily tales of a resumed Intifada; news of the death of America's *best known "beat" poet*, Allen Ginsberg; and the moving performance of Native American poet and musician Joy Harjo. These events are related and lead us back to America's 19th century poet Walt Whitman.

Whitman is the only great American 19th century poet whose physical voice has been recorded. Appropriately so, *he is the only great poet of his time who* saw himself as a singer of songs, rather than a writer of words; and his poetry reflects qualities which are generally found only in oral literature. *Oral literatures* are sung and listened to rather than written and read, and thus are by nature "messy" and unfinished. For in oral literature the song is not inscribed on the page as a script, but in history as an ongoing series of performances; and each new performance results in a slightly different version of the song. Whitman's poetry as well has the char*acter of something unfinished and open-ended*, because for him a poem was not at rest as an object but in process. Each time *Leaves of Grass* was reissued in a new edition, Whitman changed parts of the text to create a slightly different version of the book. His way of building a poem by accretion, out of lists and catalogues is a related oral technique. His long and loose poetic line is controlled by neither syllabic count nor rhyme, but by something resembling musical phrasing, by what can be said in a breath: sometimes one syllable, sometimes fifty. The voice which *emerges from his poetry is* meant to contain everything within it; Whitman calls this voice his "cosmic yawp".

Oral traditions which *exist within societies dominated* by literate and text-based cultures tend to provide voices for those silenced and on the margin. This is particularly true in America where people living on the edge of society have expressed themselves through popular song: blues, folk and their derivatives. Whitman's poetry also gives voice to those on the margin: prisoners, vagrants, and tramps, *all those dispossessed* who had lost ties to the land and to history. Whitman, singing from the centre, tried to include all these "down-trodden" in a political version of pantheism, a euphoric vision of a present and future America in which the many would be included in the one.

Allen Ginsberg saw himself following in Whitman's footsteps. Whitman was his "dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-*teacher*". *He used the* same oral poetic as Whitman and adopted the same stance as singer and performer. His poems too were continually in process, both in recorded performances and when new editions were issued. *However, Ginsberg's America was a nightmare* version of Whitman's; for Ginsberg, the many which Whitman's voice was to include had become digested and homogenised *into the one and the same*. He saw America becoming a global village of creeping similarity with language reduced to an eminently digestible global porridge. Because difference had no place in this America, Ginsberg provided it a place and gave it a voice. But where Whitman sang from the centre, Ginsberg sang from the margins. The centre where Whitman stood was, *for Ginsberg, now rotten; and his poetry attempts to* de-centre what he sees as a voracious centrality. Whitman's "cosmic yawp" which holds all within ample folds does not work for Ginsberg. *What is* needed is what he calls his "yakkety-yak": an irritating and reedy voice which just will not be shut down, which taps at the window, rattles the pipes, and reminds the centre that something undigested and different moves in the dark.

Among the causes Ginsberg supported were those of two marginalised and silenced peoples: the Native *Americans* and the Palestinians. *His support* was based on a perception of real kinship and common ground between his project and theirs. Native American poet Joy Harjo, *like* Ginsberg and Whitman, is a poet-singer, a poet for whom a poem is a musical performance, not a script on a page. She too uses a version of Whitman's loose poetic line and provides a voice for a silenced people whose land has been taken away. Ginsberg's support for the Palestinians and the Intifada reflects an even deeper kinship. For the image of stones being thrown by the young in an attempt to break a silence touches the essence of Ginsberg's own poetic project. Here are the Palestinians, made invisible, living in a place *where all the land and all the words are owned by* someone else. They are left only stones: ruins and rubble from their past which have resisted absorption and endured into the present. In breaking the silence by making these stones speak, the poetry of the Intifada must have seemed to Ginsberg of "cosmic" significance. For what he heard in these stones — in the song they sang as they flew through the air on their way to making their presence felt — must have sounded like his own voice set against a history intent on leaving all difference behind: a voice singing "yakkety-yak, yakkety-yak".

T L

The writer is associate professor of English and comparative literature at the American University in Cairo.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

New hope for the oases? Kharga is situated at the northern-most tip of the area which the Toshki Canal project is intended to serve, bringing to life a new valley in the heart of the desert

A cleaner break?

Plans to reform personal status law may ease the pain of divorce, or just cut through miles of red tape and years in the courts, writes Mariz Tadros. But for some women, legal changes will not solve the main problem: surviving after the split



In *"I Want a Solution"*, Faten Hamama illustrated the plight of many women trapped inextricably in intolerable alliances

It was either the drugs or her — Bossna Ahmed Imam wasn't going to let her husband have it both ways. As her husband didn't quite see it that way, she decided to take matters into her own hands. Gripping her purse with one hand, clutching the baby to her shoulder, Bossna waited nervously in the corridor on the first floor of the Zananiri Court, where thousands of divorce cases are reviewed every year, while her lawyer rushed around trying to complete the paperwork. Married for 14 years, and with three children, Bossna moved out of the apartment in El-Nahda and decided to appeal for a divorce. Nearly two years have gone by and her case is still being fought in the courts.

"The trouble started when our home was destroyed in the earthquake. We were given another apartment at El-Nahda, [a community complex 15km northeast of Cairo built specifically for homeless victims of the 1992 earthquake] but once we moved there he got involved in dealing bango. I asked him to stop, but he couldn't stop, he didn't want to. I asked him to sell the apartment and take another one in El-Muqattam and he refused." Since then, Bossna has been involved in a lengthy tug-of-war with her husband and the court. "I took my children out of school because he threatened to take them away from me if I continued to ask for a divorce. I moved back to my parents' place and refused to return until we leave the sordid place in El-Nahda," she explains.

In revenge, her husband filed a *Bayt El-Ta'a* suit (the "house of obedience" allows a man to return his wife to his home, by force if necessary) in November 1995. His appeal was unsuccessful, but so was her first appeal for divorce. "He cried in front of the judge, pleading with him not to separate him from his wife and children. He hired false witnesses to say that he is a good man who cares for his family and provides for them well." The judge seemed to believe him. Now she is in court again, appealing for a divorce and against another attempt by her husband to bring her back home. In the meantime, Bossna, illiterate and unemployed, is struggling to keep her and her three children's heads above water. Her husband, she says, has not contributed to her children's expenditures since she moved out. "I've been living off charity from my parents, my relatives. My lawyer is taking no fees."

Mona Hassan Riyad, Bossna's laywer, is frustrated with what she sees as the unnecessarily lenghty and discriminatory procedures through which women seeking a divorce must go. "Take for instance our first appeal, we presented sufficient documentation to show that she had been harmed. We had two witnesses who spoke out about his abusive behaviour. The judge did not recognise the accounts of one of the witnesses because he only heard him beating her up, but did not actually see her being beaten, while the other witness did," she scoffs. Now it is even more difficult for Riyad to plead her client's case, since Bossna has left her husband and there is little hard evidence to prove that domestic violence took place. "The procedures go on and on. She is required to prove her case and time is against the woman, who always has to prove she is worthy of a divorce. It is such a gruelling and emotionally damaging experience," says Riyad. Still, she contends that changes in substantive law are as necessary as in procedural law — otherwise Bossna could end up in an unpleasant mess: "Our worst-case scenario is that she be declared *nashez* (disobedient). She would lose her alimony and child maintenance. Bossna is still at the beginning of the road, for other women it has taken up to 10 years to get divorced. A long time may pass between one session and the next, procedures are complicated and highly bureaucratic, expenses are overwhelming."

A special committee at the Shura Council is currently reviewing the changes suggested in a new procedural law which aims to shorten and facilitate the process of divorce for women and their families. Fathi Ragab, counsellor to the minister of justice and head of the committee, said the sources of legislature for the Personal Status Law are to be blamed. "It is unacceptable that, at the turn of the 21st century, we are still applying laws that were passed in 1907 and 1931."

With the abolition of the two laws come significant changes in favour of women. The time between one hearing and another is to be shortened drastically, especially for divorce appeals, which may take years. No longer will a woman need a lawyer to represent her; nor will she have to pay any fees. To further alleviate the financial burden, she will be entitled to alimony (*nafaqa*) the day after she presents her lawsuit, so that she does not have to wait for the court ruling before she is entitled to it. "It is assumed that any woman applying for alimony is in dire financial need, so there is no need to keep her hanging with no safety net. She should be able to receive her alimony from any branch of the Nasser Development Bank," Ragab added.

According to Ragab, if this law passes, it will be prohibited for a husband to bring his wife back by force or divorce her without formally informing her via the court, which he must do within 90 days. As long as these reforms are not implemented, a woman could remain ignorant of her marital status, only discovering that her husband had divorced her after his death, when his will is read; alternatively, she could believe that he has divorced her only to discover that she is still married to him. The extent to which this affects the stability of the family is hard to imagine.

Court hearings in Personal Status Affairs which have so far been open for the public to attend will also be closed so that confidential family issues are not exposed to the world.

The Gregorian calendar is to replace the lunar one, "which basically targets girls who marry as minors and get a certificate saying that they are not underage according to the lunar calendar. The minimum age of marriage has also been set at 15," Ragab pointed out.

Incredibly, as the law stands now a woman could find herself married to two men if her first husband challenges the divorce ruling and wins months, even years, after she was granted a divorce. This situation will be addressed in the new law. The first husband must appeal to the Court of Cassation within six months of the divorce, his challenge to the court ruling must be looked into immediately and, if his appeal is rejected, the woman is free to remarry.

"It is not unusual under the present procedural law that in the event of a husband not showing up, a court ruling is passed, after which he objects to it, more sessions are held, the woman's appeal is over-ruled and she has to start all over again. Of course, this is a hellish situation for the woman," noted Azmi Abdel-Fattah, vice-president of Mansoura University, at a recent symposium held by the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood to discuss the new procedural law. Abdel-Fattah said the old laws are far from being "untouchable" and that the changes are long overdue. Abdel-Fattah also suggested that the public prosecutor should play a greater role in resolving marital disputes, with the possibility that a dispute may not end up in court.

"The problem is that the public prosecutor does not even record the cases properly any more," objects Nehad Abul-Komsan, director of the Centre for Women's Rights in Dar El-Salam, a working-class Cairene district. "They simply put a 'to be preserved' stamp on the cases, without including any notes or observations, which doesn't help the judge much when he is reviewing the case put before him." The fact that judges rarely have enough time to spend on each case doesn't make it any easier. Abul- Komsan, a lawyer, is sceptical of the extent to which procedures will be speeded up when there is a severe shortage of judges: "The judge doesn't even have time to listen, we are surprised when he does. But then we can't blame him, he often has to rule on over 200 cases. Perhaps if they allowed women to become judges, there wouldn't be such a crisis," she suggests.

Abul-Komsan also wonders whether facilitating procedures for women seeking divorce will be more useful than tightening and restricting men's ability to divorce their wives on a whim. Her opinion on this matter is based on her experience with women who come to the centre seeking legal aid. Abul-Komsan says that, before even discussing a woman's reasons for divorcing, they sit down and calculate the possibilities down to the last detail. "What happens after the divorce? Will she be able to care for herself and her children financially, bearing in mind that she will lose her home and have a pitiful sum of alimony and child maintenance to live on?" For illiterate, poor women, whose only skills are often cleaning and keeping house, divorce is not necessarily the wisest solution, Abul-Komsan asserts. "Even if the centre can put up their legal costs, it cannot financially support them after the divorce. If they can grin and bear it, we usually advise them to hang in there," she says.

Mona Zulfiqar, a prominent lawyer who has long lobbied for changes in the Personal Status Law, feels on the contrary that the law will make a concrete difference. "We have waited so long for this law to come out, and we are hoping it will be passed this year. I don't believe it will encounter any opposition, everyone has been calling for these changes and they have come quite late in the day. When we were discussing the new law with different groups, it was met with unanimous approval."

Zulfiqar hailed the recommended procedural changes, saying that they are a step in the right direction because they will relieve women and their families from a whole host of injustices — such as the court's non-recognition of *orfi* (non-notarised) marriages. The courts' failure to recognise these marriages as legal contracts meant that a legal break-up of the marriage was impossible for women. The court would be unable to grant them a divorce, simply because it did not recognise them as being married in the first place. After several attempts, some women have no choice but to remarry without being legally divorced from their *orfi* husbands. Things turn sour when their first husbands report them to the public prosecutor, who has the authority to detain them for bigamy.

The procedural changes must also be accompanied by substantive changes in the Personal Status Law, which has denied women equality before the law. Zulfiqar suggests that women should not be forced to prove that they have suffered physical harm from the marriage, and that emotional distress should be sufficient cause for divorce. "In this case, a woman should be able to get out, in accordance with *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet)." She also points out that the question of the apartment, the age at which children must be returned to their father, and the minimal marriage age are all examples of legal issues which need to be re-examined.



Pot Pourri

Hamada

A few years ago a friend gave me what she claimed was a baby Siamese. Her friend's cat had had four kittens and this one was the weakest — and the ugliest no doubt. If I did not take him, she said, her friend was going to put him to sleep. I never wanted any animal put to sleep — I find the euphemism quite repulsive — and certainly not if I could help it. So I took the kitten in. We had several cats already, and introducing the new addition took us some time and skill, but eventually they seemed to accept him. It was difficult not to. He was such a friendly little fellow, only interested in filling his tummy. Siamese cats are often aloof, not unlike some Spanish grandees of times gone by; but not this one. If anything, he was more of a clown. He reminded me of one of my friends' sons and, with her permission, we gave the kitten the little boy's name. We called him Hamada. Every day Hamada the cat looked more and more like his namesake. Both had an unusual interest in food. Both were chubby and both ran a little clumsily, panting noisily as they did.

Cats, I am convinced, have a secret language, and I have noticed that they often take a dislike to each other. Usually this happens on a one-to-one basis, but with Hamada it was different. On several occasions, coming home, I would see the other cats surrounding him in a perfect circle. They just stared at him sternly. As soon as I'd walk in, Hamada would sort of shrug them off and run enthusiastically towards me. It was meal time, and he wanted me to get on with it and start feeding them. Hamada ate faster than the others, and was not adverse to having a taste of everyone else's plate. The others growled at him, but at this point there was still no serious display of hostility. Besides, Hamada had a sweet way of asking for their forgiveness, rubbing his head against theirs once he had licked their plates clean.

One night I came home and did not find the cats waiting for me as usual. There was a sort of eerie feeling to the apartment, as if some danger was lurking about. In the kitchen, five cats were assembled in a perfect circle around the refrigerator. The sixth, Hamada, was sitting on top, whining under his breath. His ear was bloody. He no longer had whiskers. Later I found a few strands of bristle on the kitchen floor. I remember stupidly wondering if this represented some sort of ritual, like branding. Try as I may, I could not coax Hamada down and had to administer first aid standing on a chair. That evening, I also had to place his food on his perch. Later, I was woken up in the middle of the night by strident howling. Hamada must have tried to reach his kitty litter and had been cornered by the other five. I rescued him and accompanied him onto the balcony and back to the kitchen, where he gingerly jumped on the refrigerator once more. I found him there in the morning, looking very miserable. Fortunately, his tribulations of the previous night did not affect his appetite and, though he refused to come down, he ate a hearty breakfast. I could swear he was casting greedy glances at the others' food, but he remained where he was.

Soon a routine was established. If I understood what was happening, the five other cats had ganged up on Hamada and come to an agreement. They would not beat him up, provided he did not attempt to leave his new vantage point. They recognised his right to this little bit of territory. We took turns walking him twice a day to the balcony. If we forgot, he would remind us with that awful Siamese howl. He grew fat for lack of exercise, but seemed to have resigned himself to his state of imposed exile. We seriously considered giving him away, but he had little going for him really, except maybe his sad eyes. No longer a kitten, he had developed into a large, short-legged, bottom-heavy crossbreed of obscure origins. His fur was rather rough. He had stopped being fastidious about his appearance. Our vet had little advice to give us except to leave him where he was, which was really not good enough, considering that Hamada had been on the refrigerator for over two years by then.

One winter night, I was awakened by a strange noise. It sounded like a mighty roar, of the kind one would normally associate with the jungle. I sat up in bed and listened. Then I heard it again. Heart thumping, I ran to the kitchen. Hamada was no longer on top of the refrigerator. He had come down at last. His back to the kitchen door, he had cut off the other cats' escape route. He was inflated like a balloon, with his hair standing upright. He roared once more and, standing on his hind feet, marched on his torturers, who managed to flee and take refuge under the furniture. Hamada paused, licked himself carefully and went to sit next to the heater in the corridor. He waited a while, then stretched out luxuriously on the carpet. I thought I heard him sigh with pleasure.

The next morning, and all mornings after that, he came to claim his breakfast in the kitchen and consumed it next to the others, who observed him warily. Soon he was stealing their food again.

Today, Hamada is a sedate, elderly cat. He never grew his whiskers back, but none of the other cats dare mess with him. His place is reserved near the heater and when one of our young upstarts tries to push his/her way nearer to the source of warmth, he gives them that special look, which he has perfected since that fateful night. That is enough to teach them who is boss around the house.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Stuffed baked potatoes

Ingredients:
One kg medium-sized potatoes
1/4 kg minced beef
One large onion (grated)
2 cups chicken or meat stock
One cup pine nuts (fried)
4 tbsp. tomato paste
Butter ghee
Salt + pepper + allspice + cinnamon

Method:
Wash and peel the potatoes, cut in halves horizontally and scoop out the inside of each half with a spoon, making a cup of each. Soak the potatoes in salted water. In the meantime, gently fry the onion in butter ghee until tender, then add the minced beef, season and stir. Cover and leave to cook over low heat. Add the pine nuts, stir them in and remove from heat. In another pan, gently fry the potato halves, after drying them with a towel, then stuff them with the minced meat and place them in a cooking tray. Add the chicken stock after stirring the tomato paste in it, season and pour over the potatoes. Cover and cook over low heat for half an hour then continue cooking covered in a preheated moderate oven until the top colours (add water if needed). Serve with green salad and crispy pita bread.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Discovering Ethiopia

Nigel Ryan contemplates becoming a regular

Interesting things are happening at the premises of the Balmoral — one of Cairo's oldest and dowdiest Chinese restaurants — on the 26th of July Street in Zamalek. Under new ownership the Balmoral has become the German Corner, a rabbit warren of rooms catering, one must suppose, to those who like things German in corners. But this is not all. One of the rooms within the German Corner has been turned into an Ethiopian restaurant, and a jolly good restaurant it is too.

The room itself is comfortable, the large, well-spaced tables conspicuously avoiding the cram them in approach that mars so many new restaurants. There is nothing sparse, though, about the menu, which includes a particularly extensive vegetarian section, something of a solace, I suppose, to non-meat eaters, who have a ridiculously limited number of restaurants from which to choose.

Ordering becomes something of an exercise in multiple choice exam testing techniques in the none too imaginatively named Ethiopian Food Room, since the lists of main dishes are followed by an even more extensive list of garnishes, coded alphabetically. The result is that each of the main dishes are followed by the code letters of traditional accompaniments, with which they are served. The problem is, though, that each of the secondary dishes sounds so tempting that one ends up ordering more and more. This we merrily did, ordering *yebeg alich* and *kai misser wot*, together with a vast assortment of side-dishes: *tikil gonan, kai shiro, dinnich, fassoliya ina carrot, kai sir ina dinnish* and *aib be goman*. Fortunately, for those unfamiliar with Ethiopian cuisine, among whom I must, a little shame-facedly, number myself, the menu clearly describes the ingredients of each dish, while the staff are perfectly happy to provide any additional help.

The selection of side dishes included beetroot and potato fried with onion and garlic, spinach cooked with the same, fried cabbage with garlic and ginger, dishes of delicious soft white cheese, some plain, some mixed with spinach and — my favourite, perhaps, though none was less than good — a pungently spiced mixture of ground broad beans, garlic, ginger and tomato. Of the main dishes, *yebeg alich* consisted of lamb in a heavily scented rosemary broth, while *kai misser wot*, an Ethiopian version of daal, mixed quantities of paprika with split red lentils. The latter I would particularly recommend.

Given that all the dishes are served with rolls of Ethiopian bread — literally rolls, since this flat, brown spongy bread is served wrapped into cylinders — the quantities of food ordered were perhaps a little over ambitious. It is worth over-ordering though, since individual dishes are not overly large, and there is, as far as our ordering went, nothing uninteresting on the menu. Eating becomes a matter of simply scooping various combinations onto a piece of bread, and gorging on. Replacement baskets of bread punctuate this process, followed, when eating has ceased, with a much needed finger bowl, with quantities of lemon and sprigs of mint.

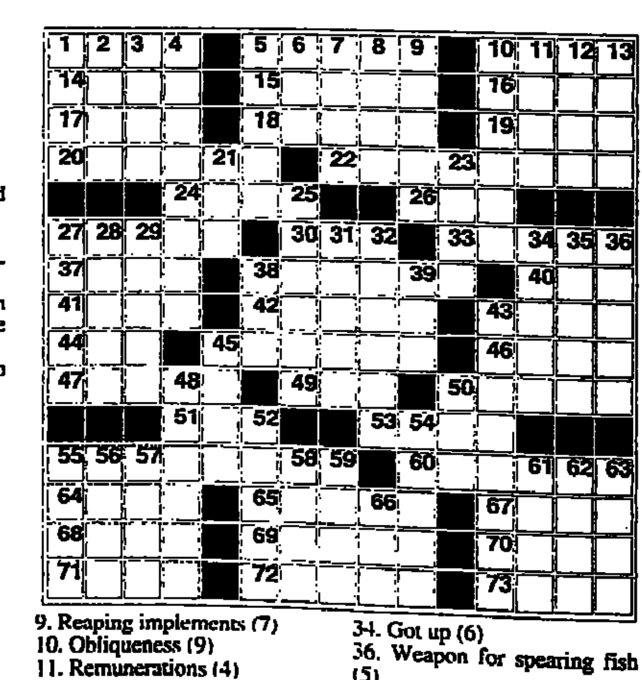
With two local beers the bill — dinner for two — was less than LE60. Extraordinary value, excellent food, exemplary service. This is one restaurant to which you will almost certainly return.

Ethiopian Food Room at the German Corner, 157 26th of July Street, Zamalek

Al-Ahram Weekly

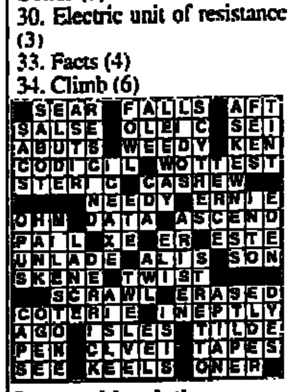
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



Across
1. Withered (4)
5. Tumbles in ruin (5)
10. Towards stern (3)
13. Mud volcano (5)
14. Type of fatty unsaturated acid (5)
15. Small rorqual (3)
16. Has common boundary (5)
17. Full of wild unwanted plants (5)
18. Recognise at sight (3)
19. Supplementary addition (7)
21. Knowest (7)
23. Atomic arrangement (6)
24. Type of nut (6)
25. Poor (5)
27. Device for drawing prize-winning number of Premium Bonds (5)
30. Electric unit of resistance (3)
33. Facts (4)
34. Climb (6)
35. Vessel for carrying liquid (4)
37. Symbol for "xenon" (2)
38. Expression denoting hesitation (2)
39. 15-16th century Italian princely family, patrons of the arts (4)
40. Remove cargo from ship (6)
42. Miss McGraw et al (4)
44. Heir (3)
45. Gaelic dagger (5)
46. Writhe (5)
47. Hasty writing (6)
49. Deleted (6)
54. Select circle in society (7)
56. Absurdly (7)
57. Past (3)
58. Wight and Man (5)
60. Diacritical mark (5)
61. Female swan (3)
62. Clive, jumbled (5)
63. Measures (5)
64. Descry (3)
65. British flat-bottomed vessels (5)
66. Severe blow, sl. (4)

Down
1. Wooden shoe (5)
2. Escape adroitly (5)
3. In motion (5)
4. Revoke (7)
5. Poultry (4)
6. Beer (3)
7. Arrears of work: margin of safety (6)
8. Pleasure beaches (5)
9. Reaping implements (7)
10. Obliqueness (9)
11. Remunerations (4)
12. Tinge (4)
13. Fluid-containing bags (4)
20. Implement used by mountain climbers for cutting footholds, hyph. wds (6)
22. 9am canonical hour of prayer (5)
24. Civil Defence Association, abb. (3)
26. French summer (3)
28. Prep. denoting direction (4)
29. Utopia (4)
30. Musical composition (4)
31. Rung for securing staysails to sails (4)
32. Event in life (9)
34. Got up (6)
36. Weapon for spearing fish (5)
38. Biblical high priest and judge (3)
41. Type of crane (7)
42. Shoemakers' piercing tool (3)
43. Music: in quicker time (7)
46. Number of Apostles (6)
48. Passage between pews (5)
50. Pertaining to bees (5)
51. Pelts, jumbled (5)
52. Person advanced in life (5)
53. Changes colour (4)
54. Nurses: headdress (4)
55. A double curve in architecture (4)
56. Mother of Horus (4)
59. Slippery fish (3)



Last week's solution



Cairo's answer to Harlem will be no more. Plans to renovate Zeinhum are afoot, but many residents are apprehensive. **Mahmoud Bakr** reviews the scene

Slum hill gets overhaul

photos: Salah Ibrahim

A teenage tough would be green with envy. Zeinhum has it all: Rugged looks and notoriety. But the rough-and-tumble neighbourhood, Cairo's answer to Harlem, is about to grow out of its adolescent ways. And the rites of passage can be proverbially traumatic.

Starting from the mid-sixties, Zeinhum mounds and parts of the adjoining Qalaat El-Kabsh were gradually transformed into a ramshackle expanse of do-it-yourself bungalows that served to house thousands of the city's poor and at one point, following the 1967 War, immigrants from the Suez Canal region.

The casual atmosphere in the neighbourhood's unpaved streets masks a darker reality. Situated between Salah El-Din's Citadel and the busy streets of El-Sayeda Zeinab, Zeinhum, with its haphazard layout and down-market coffee houses, has been a haven for drug users and dealers alike.

Recently a more sober, but no less intrepid crowd, has been showing up there. With maps and surveying equipment, they stroll up the narrow and winding roads, talking to locals and setting up shop. The urban planners are here, and with them the certainty of change.

The Cairo *Governorate has prepared* a plan to rehabilitate or demolish blighted neighbourhoods in the capital. Some will receive a moderate facelift. Others, including Zeinhum, are deemed beyond redemption and will be totally rebuilt.

Major General Qadri Abu Hussein, deputy governor for South Cairo, is in charge of turning the 50 feddans or so of Zein*hum's shacks and bungalows into a man*icured development of apartment buildings, parks and public amenities. A scheme which planners hope will improve the lives of the nearly 4,000 families living there.

It is a costly affair, as Abu Hussein, who is currently supervising a pilot rehousing plan in the area, readily admits.

The pilot plan, involving the construction *of only four apartment buildings, is a dress* rehearsal for the effort to rehouse Zeinhum's 20,000 inhabitants in 130 apartment buildings.

Abu Hussein reveals that Zeinhum's urban renewal plan has been on the drawing board for three years, held back by the lack of funds.

Last year, things changed. Cairo urban planners, in cooperation with the Coptic Evangelical Church and the German Bank for Reconstruction, helped the inhabitants form their own building association. The association will help supervise the renewal plan, toward which the Germans promised to donate LE60 million.

The planners are currently conducting a meticulous survey of the families living in the area to decide how to rehouse them. Several international organisations have promised more aid to the three-year plan.

But how do the locals feel about the promised changes?

Mahmoud Hamdi, a blacksmith from Qalaat El-Kabsh, says he bought his house in 1982. It was only a wooden hut at the time, Hamdi explained, but he rebuilt it into a brick-and-cement house complete with a bathroom. He pays LE1 in rent to the Cairo Governorate and says that he does not mind the rehousing plans, but the rents should *remain* low so that the locals, mostly manual workers with modest wages, would be able to afford them.

Hamdi men*tions the case of* a friend of his who supports a family of 16 members in a hut that has been expanded so as to make them "quite comfort*able," and won*ders if the 70-square-metre apartment the planners promise to provide would suffice to house such a family.

Bayyumi Ramadan, a retired officer now living in a brick-and-cement bungalow with a monthly rent of LE2.50, points out that many of the inhabitants have improved their bungalows, some even adding top floors to house their married offspring.

"I would rather stay in my bungalow because it is an independent dwelling with its own separate entrance. Only my family lives here and I am afraid of the problems that may come with living in apartment buildings," Ramadan says.

But some inhabitants are pleased with the promised changes. This is particularly true of those who live in the better-off section of *Qalaat El-Kabsh.*

Osama Darwish, a 29-year-old plumber, bemoans the rough image that the surrounding huts, unlicensed coffee houses and drugs impart to the area. He says that members of his family, particularly the women and children, are always afraid of going out unescorted. Darwish mentions that he and others have repeatedly "submitted written complaints asking for the removal of these huts."

Samir Dimirdash, an accountant from the up-market section of Qalaat El-Kabsh, views the shanty town with sympathy. The huts, he says, have been "renovated" and the inhabitants include "doctors and engineers." He notes, however, that the neighbourhood could use more public amenities, a fire brigade and a post office, for example.

The amenities are coming, the planners promise. *And Zeinhum will soon be step*ping gingerly into a planner-designed semblance of middle-class respectability, leaving behind almost 30 years of living dangerously.



Hygiene if not beauty: "Model" buildings such as in the photo, above left, will replace Zeinhoum's ramshackle dwellings (right). The slum's residents reactions are divided, however, over their prospective 'renewal'

Knives in school bags

Is increasing violence among school students merely another feature of the 'global village', the result of society's declining moral standards, or a reflection of an ailing education system? **Sahar El-Bahr** investigates

A primary school student stabbed his colleague with a knife during a quarrel about a desk. Another plotted to kill a classmate after an argument. A teacher was severely beaten by his secondary school students. A secondary school student set fire to *official files at his school to get back at the headmaster who expelled him.*

Stories such as these detailing crimes committed by schoolchildren regularly make headline news in the daily Arabic newspapers — and they are becoming more and more common.

"Students carry knives and sharp tools in their schoolbags instead of sandwiches, books and notebooks," lamented Atef Mahmoud, a father of two secondary school students. "The ministry responsible for students is called (literally in Arabic) the Ministry of Upbringing and Education meaning that manners are as important as education. Nowadays, schools do not teach either."

The increase of violence among students is not confined to Egypt — it's a global problem which countries like Britain, America and France are trying to tackle.

In a survey of violence in American schools, carried out by the Bucks County Peace Centre in Pennsylvania in 1995, the results were striking:

—13 per cent of students said they had brought weapons to school at one time.
—16.2 per cent of the students surveyed had been in fights on school property.
—7.3 per cent of students had been threatened or injured with a weapon at school.
—160,000 students miss school every day because of the fear of violence.
—There is an average of one murder per week in schools in America.
—100,000 school kids take guns to schools every day.

Another Washington research centre reported on the unprecedented increase in the rate of child crimes in the US — 75 per cent of all crimes committed by children in industrial countries take place in America.

Twenty years ago a play, *The Trouble-Makers' School*, which depicted a group of *disrespectful, troublesome pupils, caused a storm of controversy in Egypt. Calls for* it to be banned were voiced by some in the educational field, lest students imitated the actors in the play.

Today, however, the play pales into insignificance when compared to the crimes actually being committed by students in Egypt. The 1995 Ministry of Interior statistics show that of 843 reported murder cases, 78 — about nine per cent — were commited by school students. Out of the total number of 376 cases of robbery, students were responsible for 22 — six per cent. Another 140 schoolchildren are accused of burgling houses, 74 of stealing from shops and 30 of stealing cars. Eleven *students were accused of rape.*

The students themselves, especially those in private schools, blame the problem on poor school management. Soha Ayad, 17, a student in a private secondary school for girls said weak administration leads to bad behaviour. Students at private schools know they can do whatever they want because of their money, she said. Badly behaved students go unpunished because they are the school's source of income. "Besides, the families of the students in those schools are influential and powerful ones," Ayad added.

But violence is not just kept among the students themselves. Teachers are in*creasingly becoming victims.*

Mohamed Abdel-Latif, a secondary school science teacher, admitted that students threaten teachers in public — and put their threats into effect. Once a student boasted that he could harm Abel-Latif without being punished by paying an ex-criminal LE10 to throw sulphuric acid in his face.

"That's why I stay away from them. I do not even try to control them. If they want to fail it's up to them. Students' behaviour has become unbearable. Teaching has left me frustrated and depressed," he said.

Corporal punishment, which is forbidden in schools, should be reintroduced, *argued Abel-Latif. "I could only deal with some students by using mild physical* punishment. This is how our parents' generation was disciplined and it proved to be effective," he said.

Sanaa Bakr, an Arabic teacher at a primary school, said that students who know that corporal punishment is forbidden challenge their teachers freely, confident in the knowledge that however rude they may be there is little their teacher can do.

Many parents, however, strongly oppose corporal punishment in schools. From parent Mahmoud's point of view, other forms of punishment, such as summoning the parents to have them discipline their wayward children or depriving the offending student of something he likes, should be used.

The Ministry of Education has regulations on the procedure of punishment. In the first instance, the parents of the student should be called in to sign an agreement that they would make their child follow school regulations. If the problem continues the student should be excluded from the school for several days. The final step is to expel the student from the school. "However, to expel a student he should go through the first two procedures of punishment," said Mohsen Ahmed, an ex-geography inspector in the Ministry of Education.

The lack of respect which students show for their teachers could be partly due to the *low salaries teachers receive, said Soliman El-Mahdi*, manager of *El-Tabary* preparatory and secondary schools.

Many teachers are forced to increase their incomes by giving private lessons which can make students feel that they are giving the teacher his livelihood, he explained.

Hearing the bargaining between a father and a teacher over the fee and time of each lesson or a teacher's careless cancellation of a lesson could damage a student's respect, he said.

"Education is now a trade rather than a noble mission," said El-Mahdi.

"The media is also to be blamed," stated Nawal El-Digwi, *owner and manager of* Education Home Private Schools and a prominent educational pioneer. "Films, plays and TV series depicting teachers in a disrespectful way, describing them as the 'Mafia of private lessons' causes problems."

The lack of physical activities, which have disappeared completely from most schools, have turned them into hateful places for students, she added.

"Can you believe that scouting has almost disappeared from our schools because of a silly reason which is the cost of scouting uniforms? The uniforms certainly can be made simpler and less costly," she said.

El-Digwi believes that small things could make a lot of difference, create a happy environment and reduce levels of violence.

Sociologists agree that violence among students is an international phenomenon and that the method of teaching could be to blame.

"Traditional syllabuses are set to contain as much information as possible and teach the students to memorise information without understanding any of it. Students feel they are restricted by an educational system they hate. In our schools, educators do not pay attention to improving the real talents of the students," said Azza Korayem, a sociologist in the National Centre for Sociology and Criminology Research.

The increase in the crime rate in general could be another reason for student violence, said Korayem. Most parents are keen to teach their children one of the violent sports like karate, kung-fu, judo, boxing and wrestling to defend themselves. The students then try out what they have learnt on their colleagues.

Media, again, is to be blamed for screening violent films, Korayem maintains. The physically strong person is seen as the hero which students may try to imitate.

There are many, however, who question the assertion that 'student crime' has become a phenomenon in the country. Qadry Hefni, professor of psychology at Ain Shams University, argues that violence has become one of the basic characteristics of modern life and that it leads to crime in all age groups.

"We hear and see violence everywhere. On the TV, in the street, club, school, home and newspaper," said Hefny. "Students are one of the categories living in the society and, of course, are affected by the same social atmosphere. They are only at school for six hours a day, the other 18 hours are spent with the family and society."

For psychiatrist Omar Shahin, problems start with the family. If the parents deal violently and cruelly with their children the latter will tend to behave in a similar fashion with their school mates. Some students also suffer from emotional deprivation because their parents work most of the hours of the day, he said.

*'Student crimes' are mostly committed by secondary school students who are go*ing through the difficult teenage period with all its physical and psychological stresses, Shahin pointed out.

A decline in ethics and the rise of materialism are behind the increase in violence, according to El-Mahdi.

Ethical values are vague for many students and schools no longer discharge their double function of teaching ethics and the syllabus. In many cases the family also fails to provide moral guidance. Some of them think their only duty is to provide financially for their children, neglecting their psychological development, he said.

The huge growth in class size has also contributed to the changing atmosphere in schools and increasing violence, El-Mahdi believes.

"Only a few years ago I was teaching only 30 students per class but now I teach classes which have as many as 80 students," he said.

In addition, El-Mahdi added, the relationship between parents and school officials has weakened.

"Family and school are two sides of one coin. Among the 2,370 parents we deal with only 30 attend the parents' meetings. They even fail to attend after we keep calling them and insisting that they should attend," El-Mahdi maintains.

Whatever the causes of increasing violence in school, troublesome children should be treated more as psychologically sick people than criminals, suggested educational expert Hamed Ammar.

Social workers in schools should help schoolchildren to deal with the personal problems they face, he suggests.

"Those violent students are most probably unsuccessful in their studies, thus they compensate for their failure by trying to show off superiority (in a different way) over the other students," Ammar said.

Improvements in the system of education are not the only solution, according to El-Mahdi, but should be accompanied by an improvement in the moral upbringing of children.

"Ethics are more important than the Internet," he said.

Dance till you drop

Think of "belly"-dancing. The glamour and sensuality of this art continue to fascinate, writes **Sahar El-Bahr**, as the first Oriental Dance Festival amply demonstrates

Bored home-makers or dancers desperately seeking a new mode of self-expression: *over 40 professional* and amateur Oriental dancers — the technical perfectionists would not condescend to call themselves belly-dancers — converged on Cairo recently for a two-day workshop followed by the first Festival for Oriental *Dance. held at* one of the capital's five-star hotels.

The festival started with a show of horse-and camel-dancing to traditional mu*sic outside* the hotel. Then the Hassan Afifi folkloric dance troupe treated spectators to a series of dazzling numbers. For a little international flavour, Laila Jouvana, one of Germany's best-known Oriental dancers, performed *with her troupe.*

Laila, of course, is not her real name, but most European and American dancers prefer to adopt Arabic names, vying for the most exotic. Is this just one more manifestation of Europe's fascination with Orientalia and the mysterious allure of the East?

Laila would probably disagree. Dance — which *sells not only* the steps to stardom but also the flavour of the Thousand and One Nights — is also big business. Still, among the Date Palms and the Bedouin Belles, the sequins and the sweat, one can surely detect sincere *devotion. After* all, Oriental dance is hard work. Laila emphasises the difficulties of becoming really good. Although time and practice have accustomed her the rigours of the dance, which requires both great control over isolated muscles, and the ability to make it all look not only easy but enjoyable, she insists that the training process never ends. "If the dancer stops learning, *she will* stop being good," she states firmly.

Laila Jouvana has been dancing professionally for ten years, performing mainly at German *festivals*. For her, Oriental dance is "a way of life". She organises an annual festival attended by about 2,000 enthusiasts from all over Europe, and feels it is her mission "to prove to people that belly dance is an art and *culture, not,* as many people mistakenly believe, a woman shaking her body for men."

Laila is a convert from Yugoslav folkloric dance. What prompted her to make the switch? "I find Oriental dance *very feminine. I* like the movement, and the feelings it gives me. It is also very individual. A woman can let her suppressed feelings out through dance," she asserts.

Oriental dance is something of a craze in Germany, where five magazines and hundreds of schools are dedicated to informing *and training aficionados. In 1980,* Dedlinda Karkatile, also known as Badawiya, opened the first Oriental dance school in Germany.

Oriental dance has caught like wildfire in Europe, but especially in Germany, where the novelty and the lack of stigma associated with the trade have done much to propel it up the popularity ladder. Even the festival held in Cairo was conceived and organised by *Alaa El-Kholi and* Gamal Selim, two Egyptians who have run an Oriental dance school in Germany for the past nine years.

The organisers have a serious, holistic view of the art and technique of dance. Before the festival, the participants visited tourist sites in Luxor, Aswan and Cairo. According to El-Kholi, who has been preparing a PhD in sports medicine and has written a book, *Dance in Egypt*, the main aim of the *visit* was to acquaint the dancers with Egypt, the birth-place of Oriental dance, and allow them to get a good taste of the country's culture and atmosphere.

Around 150 students are enrolled at El-Kholi's school, where they pay from DM15 to 30 an hour to learn to gyrate like the *pros*. But El-Kholi is sad that, while Oriental dance schools proliferate abroad, there are only two in Egypt. "Although the trend is taking over internationally, it is declining in Egypt. People look down on it, and see it as socially suspect. They do not understand the main essence of dance as an art," he complains.

Ruqiya Hassan, an Egyptian dance teacher and the owner of *El-Gawhara, Egypt's only dance magazine,* feels that the festival benefited both Egyptian and foreign dancers, the former by acquainting them with international trends and the latter by providing them with an opportunity to visit Egypt and perform before an informed, exacting Egyptian audience, too familiar with dance to accept average undulations.

Hassan Afifi, the man behind the steps of the *Ramadan Riddles*, who also trained the foreign dancers during the two-day workshop, is impressed with the dancers' enthusiasm, persistence and eagerness to *learn more. "The difference between them* and the Egyptians is that the latter have neither the courage nor the enthusiasm to learn. The foreigners pay money to learn," says Afifi.

But Ruqiyya Hassan, who also trained the dancers during the workshop, has a different view of the matter. She remains convinced that foreign dancers lack the essential quality that makes or breaks an Egyptian dancer: that ineffable thing called soul, and a feeling for the music. "They cannot understand the words of the songs. The foreign dancers are just very physically fit," she explains.

So will soul or stamina win the day? For the women participating in the festival, the answer is uncertain. But as the *tabla*-player warms up, there are more important matters to contemplate.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Oriental dancing for all nations

Promoting biblical Egypt

Although Egypt is part of the Holy Land, biblical tours have not yet taken off in the land of the pharaohs. **Rehab Saad** investigates the potential of this new kind of tourism, the efforts so far made, and the problems of promotion



The Monastery of St Anthony, celebrated "Father of Monks", Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments, and the Tree of the Virgin

Biblical tourism is not just an ambition, it is becoming a reality, albeit not as quickly as some people would like. Many involved in the travel business are anxious to promote special programmes that include sites associated with the Old and New Testaments.

The need to diversify the Egyptian tourist product and develop biblical tourism was first recognised with the realisation that the tourist business was too focused on cruises and visits of Pharaonic sites. "In the last two years we felt in our company that Egypt had become saturated with cruises," said Farida Grace of Mediterranean Tours. "European travellers are no longer aimless travellers. They have special interests, whether artistic, cultural or otherwise. In my opinion, specialised tourists are the future. We want to help upgrade from the 'package client' to the discriminating traveller."

The concept of 'biblical tourism' is generally regarded in the West as concerned with the sites associated with Old Testament history alone. In Egypt, however, there are also countless churches and monasteries dating from the early Christian era.

What distinguishes a biblical tourist from an ordinary tourist? In fact, not much. People with an interest in religion are ordinary tourists who visit the traditional tourist sites, but also have an interest in special destinations. When travel agents are made aware of this, they make a special effort to satisfy them. "For example," said Mohamed Mansour of Biblische Reisen Stuttgart, a company that has been working in Egypt for 18 years and that brings about 4,000 tourists a year, "such travellers are anxious to combine culture and religion and for that reason we have both a tour guide and a man of religion accompanying them on all trips. The tour guide describes the monuments and their historical significance while his partner speaks about the religious aspects."

At present, most travellers with a special interest in the sites related to the Bible most frequently come to Egypt following a trip to the Holy Land, specifically Jerusalem. "They come from either Israel or Jordan travelling via Taba and Nuweiba in Sinai," said Mansour, who made another interesting observation: "This type of tourist is usually well informed. They are well read and come to Egypt not only to see impressive monuments but to gain a deeper vision of ancient society."

"When we talk about biblical tours here in Egypt, these are ordinary trips that also cater to those who are anxious to see such places as the land of Goshen which features in the Old Testament and Tanis and Tel El-Dab'a which are sites associated with the bondage [of the Jews]," said tour guide Ehab Farag. "These tourists then cross the Suez Canal to Sinai and follow the traditional route of Moses and the Children of Israel. Alteratively, some are interested in tracing the route of the Holy Family in their flight from Palestine to Egypt. This runs along northern Sinai from Rafah to Qantara via El-Arish, then across the Delta to Wadi Natrun and south to Cairo. Saint Serguis Church, the Tree of the Holy Virgin in Matariya, and the Church of the Holy Virgin at Maadi are attractions, as well as specific sites in middle and upper Egypt."

There are literally hundreds of monasteries in Egypt. "Monasticism started in Egypt," said Farida Grace, "yet nobody knows much about it and there is no focus on them. If we had the necessary promotional materials, maps and brochures with details on accessibility, then we would be booked up for years in advance. Also, I think it is important that the Ministry of Tourism promote these sites. This would reflect favourably on our activities," she said.

Mansour also underscored the need for promotion. "Promotion of biblical tourism is very weak in Egypt. Promotion in the local media serves no purpose," he said. But he added "Serious promotion is perhaps premature, because we have first to develop facilities on the sites and streamline procedures before we start serious promotion. Many sites can only be visited with special permission, in the case of Christian sites, some from the pope himself." Mansour also referred to problems such as areas closed for security reasons, inaccessible roads, or churches and monasteries closed during certain feasts or only open on certain days of the week.

Despite these obstacles, serious attempts are being made by some travel agents to encourage biblical tourism. They attend international tourist fairs and promote specific destinations. Slowly, Egypt's rich biblical heritage is being made better known. "We are organising 'familiarisation' trips", said Mansour. "We are inviting [foreign tourist agents] to visit religious sites in addition to the regular historical destinations when they visit various hotels and facilities to check on their suitability. They also have an opportunity to talk with priests about prevailing conditions and possible Christian sites to visit."

The most frequented Christian sites in Egypt, and the best known, besides those in Cairo, are the monasteries of Wadi Natrun on the Cairo-Alexandria Desert Road, the Christian sites in the Fayoum and Luxor, the Monastery of Saint Simeon in Aswan, the famous monasteries of Saint Paul and Saint Anthony on the Red Sea coast, and Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai. These destinations are already included in programmes organised by Mediterranean Tours. A site that could be developed, according to Grace, is the area where the famous Fayoum mummy portraits, painted in the early Christian era, were found. "The site where they were found is an important area, and a picturesque part of the Fayoum which should be visited," she said.

Some tourists have special requests, which travel agencies accommodate. These include, for example, visiting the Coptic Cathedral in Abbassiya and meeting Pope Shenuda. Others would like to know more about the daily lives of monks and their "regime". They travel to distant monasteries where they are informed about various aspects of monastic life within its setting.

Grace mentioned that the people who go on these biblical tours are mostly over 45 and regard them as spiritual journeys. Travel agents say that the interest in biblical tours comes especially from Belgium, America, Canada, Australia, England, Poland and Germany.

Egyptians in Canaan

The discovery of a Pharaonic-style tomb in Tel Halif in Israel's northern Negev Desert sheds light on early Egyptian-Canaanite interaction. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** investigates

The discovery of a woman's burial site in Tel Halif in the Negev Desert suggests an Egyptian colonial presence in present-day southern Israel as early as around 3,000BC, according to the head of the excavation team at the site. "That an Egyptian was buried at Tel Halif gives us evidence of a full-blown Egyptian colony in [what is now] Israel right after the crystallisation of the first Egyptian state," Professor Thomas Levy of the University of California at San Diego told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"Egyptians were known to have a profound and elaborate belief system about the afterlife and what was required to get there. One of these requirements was to die and be properly entombed on Egyptian soil," said Levy. He believes, therefore, that this area of southern Israel was considered part of Greater Egypt during that period.

"Most burials in the region are in caves or shaft tombs attributed to the Canaanites, but this one is typical of contemporary tombs in Egypt," Levy said. A 30-foot-long passageway descends to a burial chamber about 26 feet long, 16 feet wide and nine and one-half feet high. Within the dome-shaped chamber is a plastered stone platform on which the skeleton of the woman was found. About 25-years-old when she died, she was found in the foetal position facing east — characteristic of Egyptian burials.

Until recently, it was not possible to define the nature of the earliest interactions between unified Egypt and its eastern neighbours. The 500-year time span was lumped, according to Professor Levy, into Pre-Dynastic and Early Dynastic periods for Egypt, and Early Bronze Age for ancient Canaan or Palestine. It is now possible, however, to distinguish between the various stages of interaction between the two countries. At least four distinct stages in the earliest contacts between Egypt and Early Bronze Canaan have now been defined.

The discovery, according to Zahi Hawass, director of antiquities on the Giza plateau, is not new. "Previous evidence points to a strong Egyptian presence in Palestine," he told the *Weekly*. He added, "There are written texts which suggest that the last king of the Second Dynasty, Khashkemwy, resided in Palestine. Also, scenes depicted on pottery dating from this period prove that Egyptian traders had contact with their Syrian and Canaanite counterparts."

New theories, he went on, even go as far as to suggest that Egypt had ruled both latter-day Palestine and Syria militarily since the time of King Narmer, the first dynastic king. "The famous Palette of Narmer depicts him attacking legendary animals, the likes of which only existed in Syria and Palestine. This is further proof of the pharaoh's victory over and rule of Syria, Iraq and Palestine," he explained.

Egyptian pottery, seal impressions and bread moulds found at the newly-discovered tomb support the theory that Egypt occupied the area. Among these artifacts is a potsherd engraved with the *serekh*, the traditional motif associated with Egyptian kingship. This, according to Levy, could provide data concerning the role of King Narmer in the spread of the Nile Valley civilisation. It also sheds light on the impact of "core civilisations" on their less socially complex neighbours — specifically, on how newly emergent civilisations like Egypt affect culture changes in less socially developed neighbouring territories.

The excavations in the Wadi Tillah area of the Negev Desert started in July 1994. A wealth of material was recovered in the form of imported Egyptian pottery vessels, architectural elements, a clay seal impression and an incised shard bearing the *serekh* of King Narmer. The latter is believed to have been responsible for the first unification of Upper and Lower Egypt between 3,050 and 3,000 BC.

According to Professor Levy, the widespread evidence of a substantial Egyptian presence in the region, along with evidence of possible administrative functions on the Halif Terrace which, along with Tel Erani, is the generally accepted centre of early Egyptian activity in southern Canaan, is extremely important. "Early excavations have also revealed large quantities of Egyptian prestige goods including Egyptian ceramic vessels, a small faience jar, Egyptian storage jars and administrative artifacts such as a clay stamp impression depicting a series of flags. The flag hieroglyph represents the concept of god in Ancient Egypt. It is made of a very fine clay which, although not yet tested petrographically, seems certainly to be of Nile Valley origin," he explained.

Continued excavation on the terrace will hopefully provide comprehensive archaeological data that will help clarify the actual character of the Egyptian presence some 5,000 years ago in southern Palestine.

Easter & Sham El-Nessim deals

Nile Hilton hotel will offer outdoor Sham El-Nessim breakfast and lunch buffets at their swimming pool in the **Barbecue Garden**.

Sonesta Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada resorts are offering an Easter Breakfast. Special Easter cakes are going to be sold at the pastry shops. Sharm El-Sheikh is also arranging egg-hunts for children.

In Sonesta Cairo, at the pastry shop, **Le Fouchon**, special chocolates, bunnies, eggs, Easter cakes and gift packages will be available.

El-Gezira Sheraton is having its "Easter Eggstravaganza". There will be a party on the banks of the Nile and sumptuous breakfast and lunch buffets. Children will be entertained at a special show starring Hassan Donia, Wael Sabry and the Diamond Band Show. Additionally, there will be a Muppet Show.

A big programme has been organised by **Mövenpick Heliopolis** to celebrate Easter and Sham El-Nessim. On 27 April, the Disco will be open for a soirée from 10pm until 4am. Minimum charge is LE45 inclusive. A belly dancer will be the focus of entertainment.

On 28 April, the **Orangerie** is offering breakfast, brunch and à la carte dishes. Reservation is requested. **Mövenpick & El-Sarraya** restaurant will have their normal à la carte menus. In **Il Giardino & Terrace**, there will be a breakfast buffet from 6am until 10.30am as well as a brunch buffet from 11.30am till 4pm. Children at Il Giardino will enjoy a special show from 1.30pm to 2.30pm.

Semiramis Intercontinental hotel will herald the beginning of Spring with a traditional Sham El-Nessim breakfast and lunch at their newly reopened poolside. Special guest star Talaat Zein will sing at the **Grill**, while Linda Flemming will sing love songs at the **Ambassador Club**.

Swissôtel El-Salam will be serving a typical Sham El-Nessim breakfast followed by a lunch buffet on 28 April at the summer terrace. There will be live entertainment presented by the "Los Marcellos Ferial" trio and Egyptian singers.

For Easter, 27 April, there will be an "eggcelent" day outdoors on the summer terrace where an Easter buffet will be served. **The Marquis** will also be selling Easter bunnies and eggs.

Cairo Marriott hotel at its famous **Omar's Café** will offer an early breakfast buffet from 6:30am to 11am for LE38 per person plus service and tax. **The Bakery**, which opens from 8am to 9pm, will be selling Easter goodies: Easter cakes, chocolate bunnies and chocolate Easter eggs. In **Nile Maxim**, Marriott's cruising restaurant, a breakfast buffet will be served from 7am to 10am for LE65 per person plus service and tax.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions.
Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

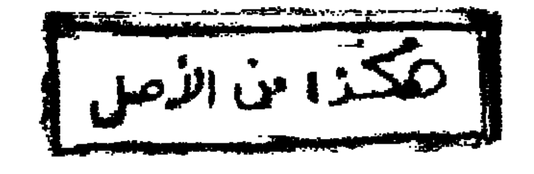
http://www.geocities.com/The Tropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.

http:// www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayyan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



هكذا من الأصل

Handball with care



Four nations will battle it out at the 2nd Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament

Handballers from Algeria, Norway, Spain and Egypt will vie for first in the 2nd Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament. The competition, which is set to take place from 25-27 April, is part of the Egyptian national handball team's preparations for the upcoming World Handball Championships scheduled to begin on 17 May in Japan.

According to national team officials, the Al-Ahram tournament is the final phase of a lengthy training programme for the team before the Japan championship. Hassan Mustafa, president of the Egyptian Handball Federation, said that the participants in this tournament represent three different schools and styles of the game — the northern European school, the southern European school and the North African school.

Of the three other teams competing in this tournament, however, Egypt msut reckon primarily with Spain, the holders of the bronze medal in the Atlanta Olympics. It is to this match that Egypt attaches tremendous importance, as it will be a gauge of the national team's readiness for the World Championship.

Team officials stress that the players will have to play their best in order to be selected for the 16-man squad going to Japan in May.

The four teams will play a one-round league, with the winner determined on the basis of points. In the first match, Egypt will face off against Norway. Then, on Saturday, it will test its skill against Algeria while Spain goes up against Norway. In the final day, Algeria will battle Norway and Egypt will meet Spain.

The 2nd Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament is part of Al-Ahram's efforts to promote Egypt's national sports teams as well as its individual athletes.

Shriver's kids

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, head of the Special Olympics International, talks to **Abeer Anwar** *about the need to provide mentally handicapped children with sports programmes*



Kennedy Shriver between Mrs Mubarak and Magda Moussa

Hand-ups are much better than handouts says Eunice Kennedy Shriver. The aging founder of the Special Olympics International (SOI) has spent the better part of nearly 40 years making sure that mentally handicapped children not only understand this maxim, but live it.

In 1958 Shriver set up the first special olympics for mentally handicapped children, running the operation from her home. It began as a day camp — a 9-3 operation in which children could participate in a number of sports, the majority of which they had previously not been afforded the opportunity to play.

"I ran the camp for six or seven years," recalled Shriver. "And over the years, I became amazed by the abilities of some of these children. This discovery, in itself, was the foundation of the Special Olympics International, as we know it, today."

The SOI began by giving small grants to select institutions and cities which had a decided interest in promoting sports programmes for mentally handicapped children. Under the guidance of the Kennedy Foundation, an institution set up by Shriver's father, Joseph Kennedy, a $3,000 grant was awarded for the establishment of sports programmes for these children. The communities which were to set up these programmes were also required to supplement the grant with another $3,000 from their own pockets.

This modest beginning for the organisation represents, if not in size, then in spirit, Shriver's ambitions. Today, SOI has branches in 150 countries, brings together roughly one million athletes and is aided by 500,000 like-minded volunteers. The group has eight African member states, of which Egypt has the largest and most active special olympics programme.

SOI's success, says Shriver, is not only a product of funding, but more so of support by private associations. These groups are instrumental in promoting and spreading awareness of the need for sports programmes for the mentally handicapped.

"In Egypt, for example, the language schools and some major companies have been served as the main sponsors for special olympics programmes," stated Shriver. To keep such programmes running, sponsors could provide funds to schools for hiring instructors, she added. More ambitious plans for SOI include soliciting sponsors for constructing facilities to coach mentally handicapped children.

These plans are merely a few of the many available means of promoting such programmes around the world. But what it really comes down to, stresses Shriver, is caring enough to make a difference.

"In the US, my son has asked a number of famous musicians to record an album of Christmas carols," said the SOI head. "The album, which is released every year, brings in about $3 million. These funds are used to promote and expand SOI activities around the world."

Egypt, adds Shriver, has been quite successful in promoting these competitions. "Egypt is the pioneer of the SOI in the Arab world and Africa," she said. "Its efforts in promoting and establishing a number of programmes for mentally handicapped athletes are proof of the country's commitment to the principles of SOI."

For Shriver, Egypt is but the latest success story. Her efforts elsewhere have also not gone unrewarded. Like the Olympic Games, the Special Olympics have bridged political and cultural boundaries. In the last Special Olympics Winter Games, held in the US, 7,000 athletes from around the world participated. The Atlanta Olympics brought together roughly 10,000 athletes. "The SOI is expanding quickly," says Shriver. "It will be just a matter of time before we are on par with the Olympic Games."

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



One of the national team's international meets — photo: Amr Gamal

Spiderman in Kuala Lumpur

THE FRENCH daredevil Alain Robert was arrested last month for attempting to scale the world's tallest building, the 88-storey Petronas Twin Towers building in Kuala Lumpur, after he had successfully climbed a smaller skyscraper in Malaysia.

According to AFP, Robert last week scaled the near cylindrical 32-storey Sabah Foundation building in Kota Kinabala, the capital of Malaysia's timber-rich Sabah state. The climb was for charity.

Thousands of onlookers, including Sabah Chief Minister Yong Teck Lee, watched the climb which raised 445,000 ringgit ($178,000).

The state government invited Robert to climb the building after the national oil company, Petroliam Nasional Bhd. (Petronas) declined the Frenchman's request to scale its twin 88-storey building. The tower operators claimed that the glass facade of the Petronas Twin Towers is fragile and could not withstand the weight of the 48 kilogram (106 pounds) Frenchman.

Last month the Malaysian police detained Robert for illegally climbing the tower to the 60th floor, but he was later released without charge.

The climber has scaled 30 structures around the globe since 1994, including New York's Empire State Building, Canary Wharf in London, the Eiffel Tower, Hong Kong's Far East Finance Centre and Sydney's Centrepoint Tower. During his stay in Malaysia, Robert, who earns a living by giving climbing lessons, provided some valuable tips to local fire department officials.

Wimbledon winnings

THE TOTAL prize money at this summer's Wimbledon Tennis Championship will surpass the $10 million mark for the first time, reported The AP. The total purse will be increased by 6.5 per cent to 6.885 million pounds sterling ($11.223 million). The men's champion will receive 415,000 pounds sterling ($676,450) and the women's winner will get 373,500 sterling ($608,805).

Wimbledon also decided to continue its policy of paying more to the men than the women since the public prefer the men's match to the women's.

Rice rockets race

TRIPLE world champion Michael Doohan blazed to his second straight victory at the Japanese Grand Prix as Honda's works team swept the top four spots on their home track, reported AFP earlier this week.

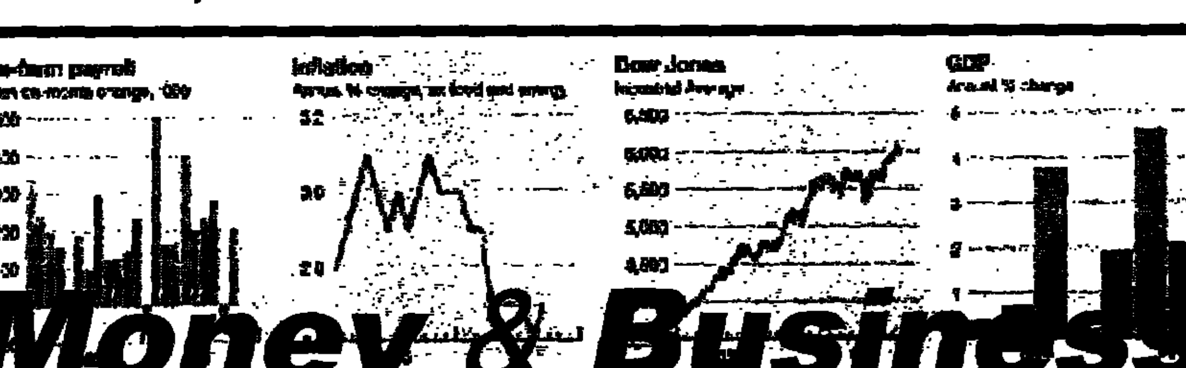
The Australian took the lead from teammate Tadayuki Okada of Japan on the 10th lap and survived a tail-to-nose battle with Spain's Alex Criville in the final five laps to notch his 36th career Grand Prix.

The 31-year-old Doohan, who also won the season-opening Malaysian Grand Prix last week, finished the 21-lap race in 45 min. 11.95 seconds on the 5.86-kilometre (3.64 mile) Suzuka circuit.

New records

GERMANY'S Sandra Volker set a new European record of 24.62 seconds in the 50-metre freestyle at the short course World Swimming Championships.

Volker broke her old record of 24.67 seconds, set in December last year at Rostock, Germany, reported AFP.



Wage increases forthcoming

SPEAKING at a parliamentary session on Tuesday, Mohieddin El-Ghareb, minister of finance, stated that the state budget includes further raises in wages approximately double the inflation rate.

He said that the government is keen on achieving a balance between wages and prices, adding that debt increases should not be a concern because part of the privatisation proceeds will be allocated for paying back accumulated interest.

The minister pointed out that the government makes amendments to the balance sheet only when the need arises.

El-Ghareb added that a committee will be formed to review means of collecting debts from press organisations in a fair manner.

World Bank takes part in New Valley project

A HIGH-ranking delegation from the World Bank arrived in Cairo, headed by the Middle East natural resources department chief, to review the Bank's participation in conducting the studies and key research for the New Valley project.

Another delegation from the World Bank comprising of agricultural research experts and professors paid a visit to the site on 19 February to examine the possibility of the World Bank financing this project.

The World Bank's delegation also discussed the implementation steps of an agricultural services project in the east Delta financed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

NBE plays a crucial role in supporting the capital market

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt (NBE) took the initiative to establish stock exchange back-office companies with a view to stimulating and developing the capital market. The bank, persuing its pioneering role in this respect, obtained the approval of the Capital Market Authority to extend the services of bookkeeping so as to supplement the infrastructure as well as the regulatory framework of the capital market.

In this context, the system of central filing is regarded as one of the instruments and methods of regulating the operation of the stock exchange. According to the said system, direct trading (purchasing and selling) of securities is substituted by book entries. The parties of the central filing system are represented in:

— Misr Clearing and Settlement Depository, being considered the central authority for keeping securities;

— The companies issuing the securities;

— Securities registers management companies or the bank's Securities Registers Management Unit;

— The holders of securities;

— Brokerage companies;

— The supervisory authorities, embodied in the Capital Market Authority and the Central Bank of Egypt.

The bookkeeper keeps the securities registers on behalf of its customers via opening a securities account, provided that such securities are registered in the central filling of Misr Clearing and Settlement Depository and that orders of selling and purchasing are given through the brokerage company to the bookkeeper.

In this vein, Misr Clearing and Settlement Depository has set a unified accounting system in addition to a special documentary cycle for traded securities.

The said system is conducted as follows:

1) The customer opens a securities account for securities registered and traded according to the system of central filing.

2) Securities are deposited in the bank.

3) Such securities are then deposited in Misr Clearing and Settlement Depository on the same day, or at most, on the following day.

4) Misr Clearing and Settlement Depository conducts a technical verification of the securities. In case the securities are accepted, they are deposited in the account of the bookkeeper which is provided by a statement of the deposited securities the following day.

5) NBE opens sub-accounts for each security in the name of the customer via the unified accounting system which the bank abides by. The day of receiving securities statements and the reporting period (daily, weekly, or monthly) are determined in agreement with the customers.

Securities Registers Management Unit in NBE's Tower Branch currently extends the said service. Meanwhile, NBE welcomes customers willing to join the system of central filing to streamline their dealings and secure their funds. The bank extends these services believing that while reaching the top is difficult, remaining at the top is more difficult and is not a matter of chance.

Faisal Islamic Bank's *Zakat* Fund

ONE OF the most important activities at Faisal Islamic Bank is the *Zakat* Fund which was launched to boost the lower-income brackets of society and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Revenues of the *Zakat* Fund are either generated by *zakat*, in accordance with Islamic law, imposed on the capital of the bank, or through the donations of the bank's clients which the bank channels into charitable activities.

In this context, the bank's funds witnessed a remarkable growth, reaching LE49.9 million.

LE25.6 million are to be distributed to beneficiaries at LE30 per person. Individuals must wait 6 months before being entitled to benefit from the fund a second time. *Zakat* is paid to widows, poor divorced women and disabled persons.

LE7.2 million is being used to provide expatriate students at the University of Sohag with housing. Similar dormitory projects were completed in Assiut and Menoufiya. Future projects of this nature will take place at Al-Bu'uth in Nasr City and at Mansouriya.

LE9.1 million in contributions are being offered to clinics and charity organisations. Many training hospitals in different governorates have benefited from these contributions.

LE2.1 million has been given to construct vocational centres, such as the one in Zeitun, Cairo, which teaches the necessary skills for carpet-weaving.

Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt has also set up charity accounts and provides easy-term loans for needy people. Beneficiaries from these loans numbered 1,500 individuals who obtained LE2 million.

photo: Randa Shaath

Mohamed Khalil Ibrahim:

Top billing

He hasn't got his name in lights but, once upon a time, he put the screen legends up there, at the top. A brush with stardom was all he dreamed of

On the street after the Sunday late show, spectators look up at the posters plastered below the neon signs, squinting in the sudden light as they make out the name of the movie which will start showing on Monday, the beginning of the film week. Few, however, are motivated to wonder who designs the posters, paints the larger-than-large portraits of the film stars, adds the graphics or pastes the masterpiece to the billboard. So few will bear the name of Mohamed Khalil Ibrahim.

This is a pity. Khalil is the billboard painter par excellence. Since the forties, he has dominated the field. His work has graced the facades of cinemas throughout the country.

Born in February 1927, Khalil grew up in an artistic environment. His father worked in decoration — not the average slap-it-on house painter, he ornamented his walls with elaborate designs. As a child, Khalil was taken by his father to the palace of the renowned traveller Youssef Kamal. As he watched his father ply brush and paint to coat the walls of the great edifice, the child was spellbound by the beauty of the place. The impression stayed with him long after the details of the visit had vanished from his memory.

His career, then, was mapped out by personal affinity and parental guidance. When he was only five, his mother placed him as apprentice to the neighbourhood calligrapher, "to involve him in a useful activity and keep him away from evil company on the streets of Bab El-Shariya when the school day was over." It is difficult to imagine what evil influences could have affected a five-year-old, but Khalil was hooked. "My new master," he recalls, "was responsible for the posters for Ramses Cinema in Ataba Square."

Khalil's life then took a turn which would lead him straight to the billboards. "I was walking with my mother down Queen Nazli (now Ramses) Street one day, heading towards an office where my mother was to pay our electricity bill, when we came across the shop of a poster painter called *Al-Khawaga* (The Foreigner) Wadie, who deserved the appellation since he wore a hat, and who, I believe, was Lebanese. I was immediately attracted to the work he was doing, and told my mother. She asked the owner if he would take me on as an apprentice during the summer holidays and he accepted. But I was too keen to wait out the long months until the summer, and I started immediately. I went to his shop on Thursdays and Fridays each week. All my free time was spent working. I spent three years with *Khawaga* Wadie, producing advertisements of all kinds, for movies, agricultural companies and world-famous brands."

Producing film posters, at the time, was an art almost totally monopolised by Greeks and Armenians. Egyptian artists, however, were taking their first steps in the field. Khalil's wildest dream was to apprentice with a master of the art. The dream was soon to come true. He heard that Abdel-Aziz, one of the most successful new Egyptian artists, who produced posters for the cinema as well as industrial enterprises, was in need of an assistant. "When I walked into the shop, I was overwhelmed. There was a to-scale model of the cinema where the film was to play. I heard myself pledging my time to Abdel-Aziz. I could work every day after school and during the summer holidays. The first posters I helped prepare were for a film called *Masna' El-Zawgat* ("The Wife Factory") starring Kouka and Mahmoud Zulfiqar. By the time we had finished the work, I had already taken a firm step on the right path. I knew where to find the materials and paints, and how the colours were mixed. I was gradually learning the techniques of the art."

Khalil was then apprenticed to Zaki Hassan. Although the master was illiterate, this never prevented him from painting, in elegant letters, posters for English and American films.

After years of experience with Egyptian poster painters, Khalil began apprenticing with foreign artists. In the early forties, he worked with a Russian painter, well-reputed on the Egyptian market, whose name was Sadowsky. His new master was immediately aware of Khalil's talent, and assigned him tasks commensurate with his skills. Khalil, however, continued to work for Zaki Hassan every afternoon at Cinema Ideal. But because the owner of Cinema Ideal, a Greek by the name of Spiro Raisi (aka the King of Cinema) was also the owner of the Royal (today Gombouriya Theatre), Paradis, Diana, Metropole and Rex, Khalil's work with Hassan entailed making posters for the entire conglomerate. The larger posters were reserved for Vasilio. Khalil single-handedly painted the small film posters for Cinema Ideal. He recalls especially the adventures of the brave and reckless heroes of Westerns, which attracted masses of devoted fans.

Arabic movies were then introduced to Cinema Royal, which had thus far only played foreign films. Along with pictures starring Gary Cooper, Gregory Peck, Jennifer Jones, Rita Hayworth and the rest of the Hollywood pack, Khalil began designing and painting billboards for Arabic films. The earliest was *Antar wa Abla* ("Antar and Abla"), starring Serag Mounir and Kouka.

Khalil's career suddenly took a giant leap forward. One day, Spiro invited him into his office, where he asked the young artist how much he would charge to make film posters for Cinema Ideal. Khalil's heart started to pound in anticipation of the raise he could be offered by Sadowsky, who would no doubt be in charge of the work, and blurted out a request for LE24 per poster. But Spiro's offer was beyond Khalil's wildest dreams. He asked Khalil to produce the film posters for Cinema Royal. "I was Sadowsky's assistant at the time," Khalil remembers, "but I said to myself that I should never let this opportunity slip by. Cinema Royal was a first-class movie house, and the offer meant I would be one of the top poster painters in the cinema industry in Egypt, side by side with the big names, Abdel-Aziz and Abdel-Rahman." Khalil assured Spiro that he would finish the first poster in three days, and immediately set to work. He worked day and night, drawing, writing and colouring the poster for the film, which starred Gregory Peck. When the 2x6 metre poster was finished, Spiro commissioned him to make ten copies, for which he received the handsome sum of LE50 pounds per copy. He managed to meet the deadline, and was assigned a much bigger responsibility: the posters for Metropole, Diana and Rex cinemas. Khalil fairly chortles in remembered exultation.

Alongside his work with Spiro, Khalil produced the film posters for Cinema Miami, owned by an Italian called Bianco. Bianco, who shuttled back and forth between Italy and Egypt, brought back novelties each time: not only the films shown at his cinema, but also a collection of innovative ideas for film posters. Khalil drew on these to fire his imagination and inject new designs and colour into his work. During his spell with Bianco, Khalil made the posters for *Banat El-Yom* ("Today's Girls"), *Ayam wa Layali* ("Nights and Days"), and most of Abdel-Halim Hafez's films.

Khalil's work, however, was largely dependent on the estimated success of a film. Publicity expenses fluctuated according to the producers' expectations. "The poster designers could tell whether or not a certain film would fail from the posters we were commissioned to produce. For example, despite Anwar Wagdi's huge fame at the time, we knew that his film *Arousa Lil-Igar* ("Bride to Let") would be a fiasco when we were working on the posters." The film played for a single week.

Other factors were also at play, and billboard artists had to deal with contingencies as they arose, often bowing to the audience's new-found adulation. *Lahn El-Wafa* ("The Tune of Loyalty"), the first film in which Abdel-Halim Hafez dazzled cinemagoers as a *jeune premier*, was playing when Khalil and his team were putting the finishing touches on the posters for *Ayamna El-Helwa* ("Our Beautiful Days"), in which Abdel-Halim played a smaller part and which starred Omar El-Sherif, Faten Hamama and Ahmed Ramzi. "After the overwhelming, immediate box office success of *Lahn El-Wafa*, we were asked to enlarge Abdel-Halim's name on separate sheets and affix them to the posters which had already been distributed."

Publicity, however, was not restricted in those days to the film posters on the panelboards. Horse- or donkey-drawn carts were also rented, on which the billboards were displayed, taking publicity out to the streets. A man on horseback, dressed like the film's hero (usually in cowboy gear), would walk beside the cart as it wound its way through the narrow streets on its publicity campaign, known in the world of cinema publicity as a "*sortie*".

The rapid political changes which affected Egyptian society as well as the world at large also had an impact on Khalil's life. During his stint as apprentice to Sadowsky, a Russian Jew, the young Khalil noticed that his employer's son, Raphael, was holding secret meetings in the basement of the workshop where the posters were painted. During the meetings, Hebrew and French were spoken so that no one around would understand. One day security forces broke into the workshop, accused Raphael of having assassinated Lord Moyne, and threw him in jail. A few days later, Raphael hanged himself in prison; Sadowsky died of a heart attack on his way to the police station.

On 26 January 1952, the day Cairo burned, many cinemas, department stores and hotels — the scions of the wealthy, cosmopolitan rulers — were reduced to ashes. Metro and Miami, largely wooden buildings, were burned to the ground. When the fire broke out, the owners of cinemas Rivoli, Kasr El-Nil and Opera asked Khalil to write up posters which were pasted onto the cinemas' facades, declaring that they were owned by *Hajj* Mustafa Jaafar's sons. The three cinemas were spared the flames, and were the only houses operating under the emergency laws and the curfew, although shows were limited to two a day, until five o'clock in the afternoon.

But apart from these extreme situations, Khalil had little time for politics, or indeed for anything but work. He admits to an early musical inclination, it is true; but this passion, too, was put to work. He joined the Fouad I Arabic Music Institute on Ramses Street, where he specialised in *qanun*. He also enrolled at the Leonardo da Vinci Institute, to study painting. "My time was divided between the study of music and art, on one hand, and the production of film posters, on the other."

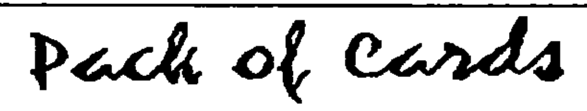
Studying music had its surprises, however. Khalil met Abdel-Halim Hafez, who was still playing the oboe then, at the Arabic Music Institute. The time had not yet come when the "dark nightingale's" golden voice and magical vulnerability was to dictate the enlarging of letters on billboards across the city.

Khalil taught music at a number of government schools, several outside the capital. With such a busy schedule, he caught up on sleep while commuting; back in Cairo, the rest of the day was spent painting movie posters. But his passion for music had material roots as well. Like most Egyptians, he strongly believed that the best possible employment was a government job to guarantee a fixed income and pension (however meagre) in addition to a lucrative private business — which also happened to be his personal passion.

Khalil's twin sons, Ihab and Adham, specialise in stage scenery and interior decoration as well as the production of film posters — carrying on their father's legacy, no doubt, but enhanced by modern technology.

Today, shrinking film publicity budgets pose as a threat to Khalil's field. Very few producers commission elaborate publicity devices like the magnificent Islamic gate which Khalil had produced for *El-Shayma* when it played at the Rivoli in the early seventies, just before his retirement. Printed posters are taking over. The garish, garrulous faces which glare down from the billboards today are barely recognisable — and the mass-produced, printed poster is the face of the future.

Profile by ***Hani Mustafa***



by Madame Sosostris

♥ Some Egyptian women are finally going places, and what places! All the way to 10 Downing Street. Four of them flew to London last week courtesy of the British Cultural Council and the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to watch the Major/Blair match in all its finesses and intricacies. To tell you the naked truth, I have no stomach for politics, British or otherwise, but I would have loved to be a fly on the wall (or in their luggage). The four selected distinguished ladies were MPs **Thuraya Labana** and **Sawsan El-Kelani**, ex-MP **Wedad Shalabi**, and **Bushra Asfour**, member of the Lawyers' Syndicate Council; the four of them are well-known for their interest and achievements in public life. Nevertheless, I still think that the invitation could have been extended a little further, and while these worthy ladies got themselves involved in sorting out the votes, I could have been busy boosting the country's economy, especially now that I am all out of false eyelashes. Besides, who says that I would not have benefitted from some observing myself? Actually, it could come in very handy when I run for a ministerial position as soon as they invent the ministry of entertainment.



